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thought of themselves as dechristianized. In any case, why single out Nietzsche from what was, after all, a whole generation of anti-Christian writers? Because, we are told, he was "by far the most influential European mind of the late nineteenth century". O'Brien concedes that Nietzsche himself condemned vulgar anti-Jewish prejudice; but he insists that the fierce anti-Christian strain in his thought led directly to Auschwitz. The link is not really established. On a similar basis one might hold George Bernard Shaw responsible for General Dyer's breach of the "Christian limit" at Amritsar.

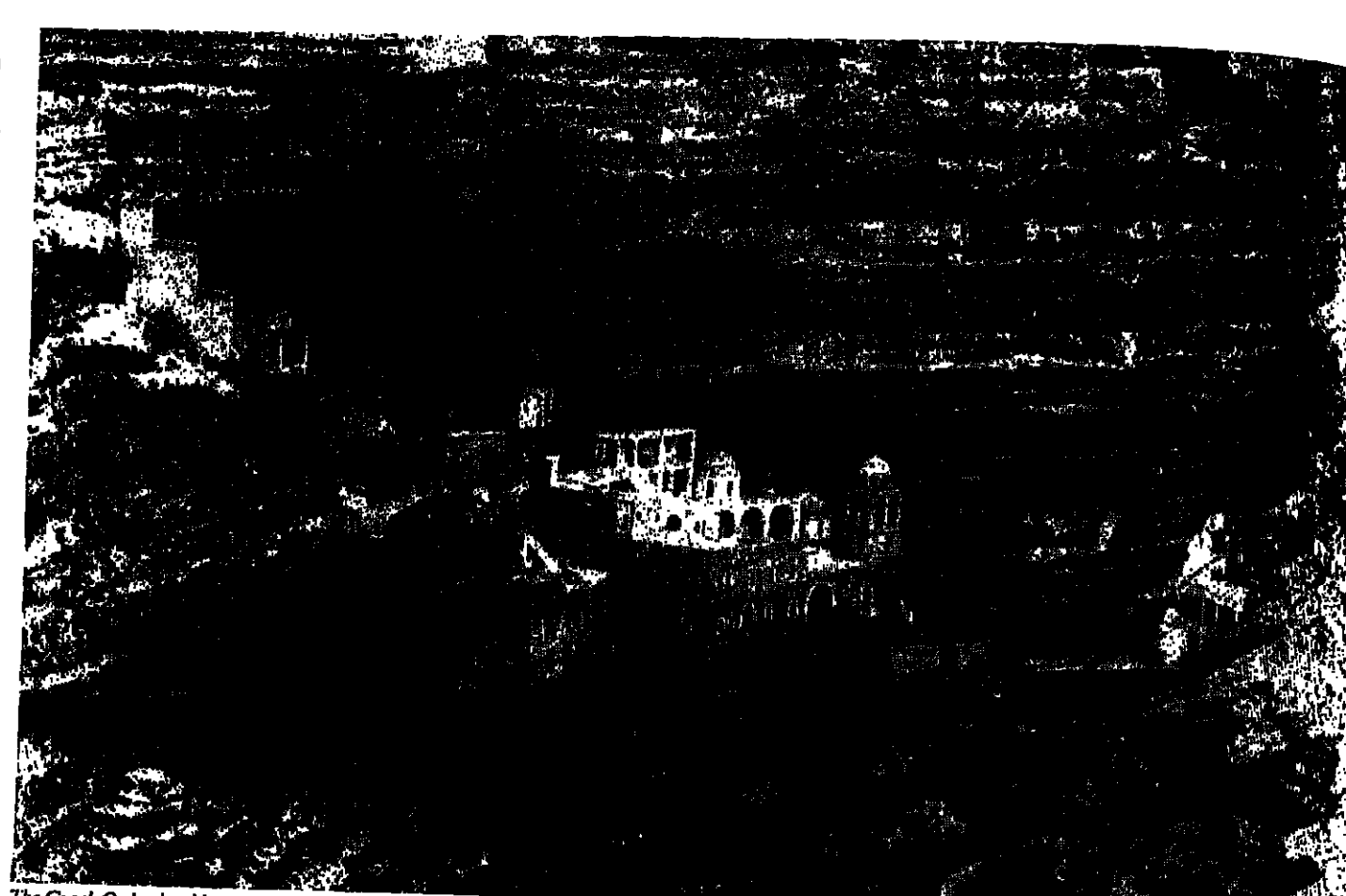
Again, in his emphasis on the role of Arthur Balfour in the authorship of his eponymous pro-Zionist declaration, O'Brien seems to rely more on intuition than on evidence. ("Records don't show everything", he reminds us.)

In his discussion of the approaches to the Axis made in 1940-1 by the Stern Group (the lunatic fringe of Zionists who advocated collaboration with Hitler against the British and against the mainstream Zionists), O'Brien argues that the Sternists' "monstrous proposals" were the only ones that corresponded to the monstrous predicament of the European Jews" - a dubious hypothesis relying as it does on the suggestion, advanced by O'Brien, that such a deal with Hitler "was not altogether inconceivable". That Hitler was capable of making tactical alliances with anybody is demonstrable; that any such deal could have bought more than a temporary respite seems difficult to imagine; in any case Hitler rejected any such paeinings with Jews; it is therefore hard to agree that these "monstrous proposals" corresponded to anything save the fervid imaginations of the Sternist leaders (one of whom, Yitzhak Shamir, takes office this week as prime minister of Israel).

Throughout the book O'Brien draws suggestive parallels between the predicaments of the Jews and the Irish - "two stigmatized peoples", as he calls them, though he analyses with great sensitivity the different natures of the stigmata. He compares the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, with Daniel O'Connell; the behaviour of the Black and Tans with that of the British army in Palestine; the *Altalena* incident of 1948 (when the Israeli army blew up a ship carrying guns to Begin) with the shelling of the Four Courts in Dublin in 1922. Most usefully he compares the effectiveness of the Jewish and the Irish lobbies in America.

The influence of such ethnic lobbies on American foreign policy has long aroused particular indignation in Britain - most vividly enunciated by Ernest Bevin (with that special delicacy of expression that helped make him the Foreign Office's favourite Foreign Secretary of this century). But as O'Brien remarks in a footnote (some of the best bits are in his footnotes): "Jewish votes in America were no less important a part of the international context in which Bevin had to work than Arab oil was." As for the widespread feeling in Britain (which persists today) that, however realistically or for that matter the Irish, or the Greek) lobby in the United States is somehow illegitimate, O'Brien quotes (again, alas, in a footnote) Crossman's parliamentary riposte to Bevin: "The point that there are so few Jews here that they can be safely disregarded, electorally, does not make us moral and the Americans immoral, for having regard to the Jewish vote."

The Jewish lobby in the United States looms large in Wolf Blitzer's *Between Washington and Jerusalem* and James Lee Ray's *The Future of America - Israeli Relations*. In the case of Blitzer, indeed, it looms so large that the hero of the book seems to be AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the professional arm of the Israeli lobby on Capitol Hill. Blitzer carries his argument, as to the effectiveness of the lobby and the service it renders to American interests, to ridiculous lengths. Military assistance to Israel (some \$17 billion over the past decade) constitutes "a real bargain", Blitzer maintains with a very straight face. He assures us that this investment stands ready to be put to good use in the event of a "cold-war confrontation in the Middle East". Rulers in the Persian Gulf may or may not feel reassured by the concept of the Israeli air force as a guarantor against Soviet subversion, but the portrait of Israel as a barrier to Soviet



The Greek Orthodox Monastery of St George in the Wilderness of Judaea, reproduced from *The Land of Israel*, with 174 full-page colour photographs by Hilla and Max Jacoby (Thames and Hudson, £18.05/0.500 24101 5), which has recently been reissued.

influence in the region is a little over-drawn, and strains the credibility of Blitzer's account of American-Israeli relations.

Admittedly he demonstrates the effectiveness of AIPAC. At the same time, and no doubt unconsciously, he exposes the repellent side of what has turned into a self-serving and irresponsible bureaucracy. It is not just those who are bombarded by AIPAC's shrill and mindless propaganda mailings who are put off. Ora Namir, a senior Labour parliamentarian in Israel, recently called AIPAC "a golem [Frankenstein-type monster] that has turned on its creator". Occasionally, as in the recent case of proposed US arms sales to Saudi Arabia, AIPAC has acted out of step with official Israeli policy (by taking over-energetic measures to try to block such sales), apparently concerned less with advancing Israeli interests than with promoting its own standing in Washington. Next to the National Rifle Association (with which it shares many common characteristics), AIPAC is probably the most powerful special-interest lobby in Washington. But often it gives the appearance of distorting rather than reflecting the ethnic interest it claims to represent - more like the squalid Noraid than the "glamour organization" of Blitzer's encomium.

In other respects Blitzer's work is a disgrace to the distinguished imprint under which it appears. Shabbily bound, badly proof-read, rambling, repetitive, and deformed by a gracelessness of prose which contrasts with O'Brien's nimble elegance, this book comes to us without a "health warning" - but with no fewer than nine endorsements (several of the endorsers are themselves the recipients, or the victims, of uncritical flattery by the author in the course of the book). Perhaps the most inexcusable aspect of this shoddy production is the tendency to slur the characters of those who run foul of Blitzer's "glamour organization", most notably former Senator Abraham Ribicoff, whom Blitzer indicts as unaware of his "special responsibilities" (as an American Jew). Some might argue that Ribicoff's criticisms of AIPAC and of Menachem Begin (as, most famously, of Mayor Daley at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago) exhibited just such an awareness, but to the AIPAC mentality such public exhibitions of scruple are about as welcome as Lord Pitt at a Sinn Féin rally.

James Lee Ray shares Blitzer's interest in the American Jewish lobby, though where Blitzer calls it "sexy" (sic), Ray sees it as a sterile influence. He quotes John Foster Dulles's opinion: "The Israeli embassy is practically dictating to the Congress through influential people in the country." Ray's earnest little essay follows, in a well-presented if unoriginal way, the line of argument currently

associated in Washington with George Ball. Both urge a U-turn in American policy towards Israel, although Ray adds a nuance of his own: in return for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, the United States should offer Israel a formal military alliance. An air of futility hangs over Ray's book, since he himself admits that "the United States probably will not be able to persuade the Israelis to give up even a substantial part of the occupied territories". Whatever other objections there might be, Ray's proposed *pourboire* seems unrealistic. On November 30, 1981, Israel and the United States actually signed a "memorandum of understanding on strategic cooperation" which enshrined what was termed "the mutual security relationship that exists between the two countries". Far from inducing the Begin government to be more co-operative in the matter of the occupied territories, it helped pave the way for Ariel Sharon's disastrous adventure in Lebanon six months later.

In *New Zionism and the Foreign Policy System of Israel*, Ofra Seliktar approaches the Lebanon war, and the changes that that seems to denote in Israeli political culture and foreign policy objectives, from the point of view of a political psychologist. She bears a heavy freight of jargon and damages much of her cargo by persistent mangling of names, dates and facts. But she does provide useful public opinion poll data showing some of the disturbing evolutions in Israeli attitudes: for example, the "strong and persistent sentiment against media freedom" - a 1983 poll indicated that 65 per cent of Israelis supported limitations on the press; and decline of respect for the rule of law - 52 per cent thought the Kahan Commission report (which censured Ariel Sharon and other members of the Begin administration for indirect responsibility in the Sabra-Shatila massacres) "too harsh".

These, of course, are two manifestations of the " nastiness" discerned by Gerald Kaufman, the decline of liberal values, and the growth of what appears to be a new spirit of ruthlessness exemplified most powerfully by Sharon. Bernard Reich's bland, encyclopaedia-style survey, *Israel: Land of tradition and conflict*, does not really come to grips with this issue though it provides a plodding potted history and a reliable account of the Israeli economy, military doctrine and internal political scene. Samuel Sager's exemplary analysis, *The Parliamentary System of Israel*, seems inevitably a little inhibited by his position as a clerk of the parliament, but he nevertheless inserts some telling indicators of the problems of running a liberal political system superimposed on what has become in recent years an increasingly illiberal population. He points, for example, to the "torrid progress" of human rights bills in the Knesset. With reference to one clause of

such a bill, affirming that "every person is entitled to the freedom of divine worship", he quotes the response of a spokesman for one of the orthodox religious parties who called that section "shocking". (The representatives of orthodox Judaism in the Knesset have for the past thirty-eight years prevented the effective exercise of religious freedom by Conservative or Reform Jews in Israel.)

Whether Israel can, under such conditions, remain a democracy, and if so what kind of democracy, engages the attention of Asher Arian in *Politics in Israel*. (It should perhaps be made clear that Chatham House Publishers take their name from a town in New Jersey, not from the Royal Institute of International Affairs, with which they seem to have no connection.) Arian is Israel's foremost psephologist, and has produced a number of Nullfeld-type studies of Israeli elections. Here he synthesizes the findings of Israeli political scientists over the past two decades; the result is the most up-to-date overview of the Israeli political system. Arian sometimes skims too quickly over points that might have been more fully developed, but even some of his passing comments contain useful insights.

For example, he notes the tension in Israel between abstract support for democratic principles and faltering of such support when the question becomes "less abstract and more salient". He suggests that "despite the surface support for democratic norms, there is a stubborn respect for the strong personality in Israeli politics". And he sees through the "cockiness and self-assurance" on the surface of Israeli public life to a fundamental "desire for order, for security, and for leadership".

Amid the general movement in Israel away from liberal principles, it has been generally accepted that the judiciary continues to be a bulwark of freedom - this in spite of the absence of a constitution, of a civil rights law, or of judicial review of legislation. Arian calls the Israeli judicial system "very un-Israeli and hence important as a bastion of Israeli democracy in a sea of forces that would hasten the erosion of its foundations". The integrity of Israel's courts has been recognized even by nationalist Palestinian Arabs in the occupied territories, one of whom told Walter Reich (a psychologist whose *A Stranger in My House* is yet another thin but intelligent travelogue on Israel and the West Bank): "You can get justice from the Supreme Court. You can't get justice from the military administration."

Esther R. Cohen, in her exhaustive formal analysis, from an international law perspective, *Human Rights in the Israeli-occupied Territories, 1967-1982*, examines some of these assumptions and reaches measured but forceful conclusions. Applying the rules of belligerent occupation and the developing con-

cept of international law on human rights to the Israeli occupation régime, she reproves the military administration for the use of collective punishments and deportations, while arguing that in general Israel's policies in the territories occupied in 1967 have been in conformity with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention.

But she too detects an erosion of respect for human rights after 1981, and (like many other observers) she connects this with Sharon's take-over of the Defence Ministry (responsible for the military administration of most of the occupied areas). Sharon's brutal policy in the West Bank, which included the arming of thugish, quiescent elements (similar to the police-backed black vigilantes in the South African squatter camps), earns low marks from Cohen. She details the officially ordered beating of prisoners, the curfews, demolitions of houses, closures of universities, and limitations on press freedom - all of which she terms "gross violations of human rights" that "cancelled many of the positive aspects of Israeli occupation policy".

In the tension between Israeli democracy and the occupation régime on the West Bank and Gaza strip we approach the heart of the dilemma facing Israel since 1967. Can the two régimes, so different in nature, coexist on a long-term basis? Or must the continuing role of a colonial policeman infect the Israeli political system itself, heightening the tendencies to authoritarianism and violence?

Perhaps nobody is better equipped to answer such a question than S. N. Eisenstadt, author of the standard work *Israeli Society* (1965) and a dominant figure in Israeli sociology. Unfortunately his latest book, horribly prolix and written with the light touch of a steamroller, goes only part of the way towards such an answer. The first part of this 566-page "interpretative essay", *The Transformation of Israeli Society*, consists of Eisenstadt's turgid meditations on the nature of Jewish history since Abraham. The middle section provides a useful updating of Eisenstadt's *magnum opus* - gravely disfigured by some sloppy mistakes in statistics. Only in the final part does a more coherent and original argument develop.

The core of this is the "process of decomposition" that Eisenstadt perceives in the "initial institutional mould that was regnant in Israeli society". That mould was, of course, the socialist-Zionist vision of yore, so beloved of Crossman and Kaufman. Like Kaufman, but with an immense mass of data to support him, Eisenstadt argues that that vision is exhausted and bankrupt. Perhaps the most important single indicator of this bankruptcy, he suggests, has been the increasing dependence of the Israeli economy since 1967 on Arab labour, imported from the occupied territories.

In Eisenstadt's later pages, as in many others of these books, the spectre of Ariel Sharon haunts the discussion of the future of Israeli democracy. Even O'Brien, who waxes indignant against the use of Nazi analogies by Israel's enemies, concedes that "it was perhaps true that Sharon was a little like the swaggering Goering". Far more than the media bogey, Rabbi Kahane, far more than his former mentor, Menachem Begin (who, for all his demagogic instincts, exhibited a punctilious respect for at least the outer forms of parliamentarism and legality), Sharon personifies the threat to the survival of liberal values in Israel. Sharon's bulldozing of the Israeli Cabinet, the Israeli opposition leaders, his American allies and even his own commanders in the field, during the Lebanon war, stands nakedly exposed by Israel's foremost military correspondents, Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari (their first-class book - *TLS*, May 17, 1985 - is now conveniently available in a new, slightly revised edition).

His brazen outrages in Lebanon, from the bombing of Beirut to the razing of the Ein Hilweh camp, were committed before the gaze of the world. His condemnation by the Kahan judicial commission of inquiry into the Sabra-Shatila massacres compelled his resignation from the Defence Ministry.

Yet Sharon has bounced back, unrepentant and unabashed. He serves now as Minister of Commerce and Industry in the government headed until this week by his Labour opponent, Shimon Peres. This coalition, an unnatural alliance, hamstrung by the contradictory aims of its opponents, has assisted the politi-

cal rehabilitation of Sharon. Dismissed in disgraceful circumstances just three years ago, he is now once again *papabile*: he could yet become Israeli prime minister.

How can one explain this disturbing reversal? Tactically, no doubt, Sharon was helped by the rise of Rabbi Kahane. But beyond that one must look to the continuing consequences of the occupation and of the Lebanon war - Sharon's war. In a powerful article recently in the *Jerusalem Post*, Hirsch Goodman, the paper's excellent military correspondent, wrote: "Four years ago Sharon launched this country on a path of folly, but we remain the fools." For many in Israel (particularly on the right) the Lebanon war is now out of sight and out of mind. But, as Goodman observes, "the criminality of this war" arose not only from its military and political excesses "but even more in the damage done to the collective mind of this country's serving youth".

Can Sharon, and the larger evil that he stands for, be stopped? O'Brien, who passes a shade too lightly over the Lebanon war and its aftermath, stops short of issuing "admonitions" to Israel, though he observes no such self-imposed restraint ("Christian limit") in the case of the Palestinian Arabs, whom he advises on his final page to abandon illusions and (in effect) to put up and shut up with their present position. Israel, O'Brien asserts, "cannot be other than what it is".

By that he seems to mean that Israel is a prisoner, not only of her circumstances, but also of her own character. Israel, he thinks, is most unlikely to withdraw from the West Bank, because of her security preoccupations, and because no peace agreement seems on the cards with Jordan. But beyond that he believes that Israel's "siege mentality" (a product, he stresses, not of paranoia, but of modern Jewish history and of Arab refusal to acquiesce in Israel's sovereign existence as a Jewish state) precludes any serious possibility that Israel will pursue a radically different policy.

Against this deeply pessimistic analysis, a few reservations may be entered. The first arises from O'Brien's apparent assumption that Israel could withdraw from the West Bank only by agreement with Jordan. Curiously, this notion echoes the similar mistake in the mind of Israeli policy-makers in the later stages of the Lebanese imbroglio, who persuaded themselves (and some of their American allies) that withdrawal from Lebanon hinged on an agreement with Syria, and (of lesser importance) with Lebanon. When Syria haughtily refused to issue any such imprimatur (and after the Lebanese cancelled theirs), the Israeli government calculated its own interests and withdrew (more or less) anyway. No Jordanian permission is required for an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, whether total or partial.

In the last analysis, the question is one for Jerusalem not Amman, since it is Jerusalem that is the power in possession. The question for Jerusalem in the last resort is what sort of state Israel is to be. But that is a question, to which there is, as yet, no determined answer. Certainly it is not foreordained that Israel must develop into a Levantine Ulster (at best) or South Africa. The alternative of a smaller, more homogeneously Jewish, therefore democratic and non-colonial Israel remains attractive to roughly half of Israel's Jewish population according to most of the polls.

O'Brien, who no doubt thinks of himself as a friend of (albeit not an apologist for) Israel, perhaps sets too little store by what might be called the "Jewish limit" - the raw nerve, also a product of Jewish history, that, in the wake of the Sabra-Shatila massacres, brought hundreds of thousands of people on to the streets of Tel Aviv to demand the appointment of a judicial commission of inquiry.

Something snapped on that occasion, something that came from much deeper within the heart of Jewish experience than the semite Begin's reflexive incantations of "blood libel". At least at that critical moment in the country's moral history, Israeli democracy showed that it does have the power of choice, that it can be "other than what it is".

The siege, Dr O'Brien opines, will probably endure. He may well be right. But it remains within the power (not only in body but in spirit) of the besieged to break the vice of circumstance and the bonds of history - if they so choose.

## Fighting without a script

Dominick Graham

MICHAEL CARVER  
*Dilemmas of the Desert War: A new look at the Libyan Campaign 1940-1942*  
160pp. Batsford. £14.95.  
07134 53060

General Neil Ritchie, who commanded the Eighth Army under General Auchinleck from November 1941 to the end of June 1942, died in 1983. He had kept silent when the historical community in general, and even Auchinleck and his chief biographer, John Connell, in particular, cast him as scapegoat for Eighth Army's failures. Lord Carver, who served under Ritchie in Eighth Army and later in North-west Europe, although never on his personal staff, was granted access to his papers and has set out to put the record straight. He has succeeded. He does not pronounce Ritchie or his Army "Not Guilty" but rather "Admonished". Ritchie himself would have approved the verdict.

In his final chapter, entitled "Wash-Up", Carver is able to offer an illuminating overview of the desert campaign. Tactically, infantry was unable to defend itself in the open against tanks. Protected in small, mine-girt fortresses called "boxes", it was a hostage to enemy armour unless its own tanks could survive in the open, between boxes. Unfortunately, British armour was usually worsted by the Afrika Korps, because anti-tank guns dominated the battles and the Germans handled them more effectively. This gave the Germans an advantage in battles that were usually impromptu and always confused. No individual commander could be expected to overcome this tactical handicap by himself, nor solve the command problems that resulted from it, unless he were given time to change the terms of the tactical equation. Only a combination of the natural strength of the Alamein position, with its desert flank on the almost impassable Qattara

Depression, time and his own determined personality, allowed Montgomery to do that between August and October 1942. Even he did not teach his armour how to manœuvre reliably in impromptu battle.

What was fundamentally a complex tactical problem was seen higher up to be simply one of personalities and morale, and historians have been inclined to follow the same line. In fact, exacerbating the tactical faults were others, in what is now called the three Cs - Control, Command and Communications. Carver emphasizes these weaknesses and documents them.

If there is a loser in the story, inevitably it is Auchinleck. He appointed Ritchie in the middle of a battle, and, knowing he was not qualified for the job, interfered with him. But if Auchinleck was given to breathing down Ritchie's neck and sending him inappropriate advice, he had Churchill on his own back, as a superior whose Ultra briefing seldom provided tactical information in time, but who was quite uninhibited by that. To make matters worse for Ritchie, if communications between London and Cairo were excellent, they got progressively worse between Cairo and the front. When battles were at their height, usually in the evening, the yammering of Morse interference, snatches of music from the BBC or Radio Belgrade, and the overwhelming "mush" created an additional screen of anxiety between the commander and those he was trying to direct. Running a fast-moving battle was frustrating and nerve-racking enough without the intrusion of unattributed intelligence from the rear.

*The Arab Military Option* by Saad El-Shazly (329pp. San Francisco: American MidEast Research, \$26. 0 9604562 1 X) consists of a comprehensive analysis of the Israeli armed forces, her arms industry, her possible nuclear capability, the superpower balance, the future of the relations between the United States and Israel, and between the former and the Arab world.

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# Bitter harvests

Christopher Johnson

World Development Report 1986  
256pp. Oxford University Press for the World Bank. £26.50 (paperback), £10.45.  
0195205170

In the beginning, economics was dominated by agriculture. The powerful ideas of Quesnay, Smith and Ricardo were rooted in the fertile soil of France and Britain, and were expressed in terms of the price of corn, the role of merchants, and the rent to landlords. Agriculture is now moving back to the centre of economic argument. It has taken a series of catastrophic famines to demonstrate that agriculture is too important to be left to agriculturalists, just as it took the OPEC oil price shocks to show that energy could not be abandoned to geologists.

Too much time and intellectual capital has been wasted on the great Malthusian fallacy – based on a slick juxtaposition of arithmetical and geometrical progressions – most recently revived by the Club of Rome, and given temporary credence by the exceptional boom in commodity prices in the early 1970s. But the problem today is not that of too much money and too little food, but rather of too much food and too little money. The World Bank, in its 1986 *World Development Report*, addresses itself as much to the industrial countries which subsidize agriculture and generate surpluses as to the developing countries whose policies penalize it and create shortages.

The argument runs something like this. There are two agricultures: that of the First World of industrial countries, and that of the Third World of developing countries. (We can leave out the Second World agriculture of the Soviet bloc countries, which exemplifies the worst of both the other worlds.) Between them they make up 7 per cent of world output, comparable in importance with energy. But agriculture is over 20 per cent of Third World output and only 3 per cent of First World out-

put. Yet the industrial countries, using one-fortieth of the labour, produce half as much agricultural output as the developing countries, because their productivity is twenty times higher.

Agricultural output is increasing three times as fast in the Third as in the First World, but it needs to be because there is a similar difference in the rate of growth of population. Yet the industrial countries' share in world agricultural trade has been increasing, and that of the developing countries diminishing, until they now have equal shares. The former have a substantial surplus in agricultural trade, the latter a deficit – though not as big as that of the Soviet bloc. This is a reversal of the traditional pattern.

W. Arthur Lewis has rightly questioned the conventional wisdom that the developing countries have a comparative advantage in agriculture, and the industrial countries – by definition – in industry. Adam Smith made a related point about the greater scope for skill in agriculture as compared with that of less advanced forms of manufacturing. "The art of the farmer, the general direction of the operations of husbandry . . . requires much more skill and experience than the greater part of mechanick trades." The Third World has plentiful, but backward labour; extensive, but often barely cultivable land; and a scarcity of capital and material input. The First World has relatively expensive and limited resources of land and labour, but has more than made up for this disadvantage with inputs of capital and materials, exploiting superior technology and management skill with the encouragement of subsidies. Also, the climatic risks are manageable in the temperate First World, but can be disastrous in the tropical regions of the Third World. The result is that Britain's wheat yields, for example, have doubled in only a decade, and are nearly four times those of India, which have taken two decades to double.

The two agricultures portrayed in the Report are, however, the extremes. There are peasant farmers in parts of the European Com-

munity, and some of the middle-income developing countries have successfully applied the "green revolution". In the First World, it is the industrial leaders which are the most efficient in farming, and in the Third World it is the Asian countries which lead, and the African ones which lag, in both agriculture and industry. The calculation of comparative advantage will always be finely balanced, because agricultural and industrial development help each other along, with town and country providing growing markets for each other's products. The transfer of population from agriculture into industry improves the position of both sides, raising both agricultural productivity and industrial production.

The only step missing in the World Bank's argument is to explain how it is that governments persist in such perverse policies when the damage they do and the losses they impose are so obvious. Some political punches doubtless have to be pulled. The Bank points out that many developing country governments are trying to promote industrialization by penalizing agriculture. The end is often wrong; the means always so. The main policy mistakes in the Third World are excessive taxation of agricultural exports, overvalued exchange rates, and controls on food prices. Governments have their political power base in the cities, and try to gain support there by holding down living costs and spending large sums of public money, at the expense of their farmers. China has set the Third World an example – with the encouragement and approval of the World Bank – of how to stimulate agriculture by raising farm prices and returning food distribution to the free market. Unfortunately, many Third World countries less identified with Communism than China have destroyed their own agriculture by putting into the hands of an inefficient State apparatus the means of its production, distribution and exchange.

The industrial countries have committed the opposite sin of conceding excessive political influence to small – but often highly concen-

trated and organized – minorities of farmers. The European Community and, it is less often recognized, the United States, have subsidized agriculture on a vast scale by price maintenance, trade protection, deficiency payments and just plain old-fashioned subsidies of all shapes and sizes. The desire to buy farm votes by keeping their incomes rising in line with those of others has combined with a mercantilist quest for self-sufficiency and a foreign exchange surplus. The result has been untrollable overproduction and expensive mountains of deteriorating and unsaleable food. In the United States, the attempt to cut output by cutting prices – which Europe has perhaps wisely not attempted – has led to a sharp price subsidy, and to financial and human disaster in the farm belt.

The facile attempt to assign the problem of First World overproduction to the solution of Third World famine could even make matters worse. Cheap imports of the wrong kind of food may enrich governments, impoverish farmers, and yet fail to alleviate starvation. The best thing to do with the EEC Common Agricultural Policy is to export it to Africa. The goals of raising farm incomes and increasing self-sufficiency in food are no longer appropriate to Europe, but urgently needed in its inner colonies. The most efficient farmers of the First World do not require subsidies, what only help marginal farmers to postpone the inevitable exit. The potentially efficient farmers of the Third World do sometimes require subsidies to offset the devastation caused by mistaken policies. Above all, freer trade in agriculture is needed to damp down price fluctuations and make it clearer who has a comparative advantage in producing what, once the artificial rewards and penalties are stripped away. Let us hope that the views of the splendid World Bank team get a fair hearing at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations, where the major powers have at least professed their determination to do something about agriculture.

in the United States, J. P. Morgan; and in Japan, Nippon Life. He finds that shareholdings are most dispersed in Britain and least in Japan.

To arrive at these conclusions, Scott has used data from publicly available sources. Unfortunately, they are out of date. The American and Japanese studies are based on 1980 data; the UK data are ten years old. Ownership patterns may be comparatively slow to evolve, but much has changed recently. For the sake of greater topicality Scott could perhaps have sacrificed some technical rigour.

The heart of the book consists of a thorough analysis of corporate control in the United Kingdom, where Scott proves that big funds

achieved virtual monopoly over mobilization of capital between 1936 and 1951. But to all through the details of British share ownership, blithely ignoring both the Thatcher Government's privatization programme and City deregulation, seems naive. British Telecom, for example, is no longer State-controlled. And Britain's financial sector has undergone tremendous upheaval as giant foreign banks buy into venerable City firms. The short-term trading mentality in the City, together with the availability of huge amounts of capital, means that institutions can now unload shareholdings in faltering companies rather than get involved in messy restructuring.

By the time he reaches the latter section of the book Scott seems to have run out of steam. We are treated to a tantalizingly cursory look at share ownership in the United States and in Japan and some interesting comparisons emerge. We learn, for example, that ownership of American companies began to fragment far sooner than in Britain, but among individuals and powerful families such as the Rockefellers, rather than among big funds.

It is even more of a pity that Scott gives corporate control in Japan such rudimentary treatment because it provides a strong contrast with the British and American models. Japanese corporations are tight interest groups built up by wealthy families who raised capital through their banks and trading companies, virtually ignoring the stock exchange. While Scott discovers subtle differences between "traditional" pre-war enterprises and the "modern" groupings, he only hints at a possible shift in control as a result of which they have come to resemble more closely Anglo-Saxon structures, but he fails to explore its nature.

Although there is much fascinating material in Scott's book, it is bolstered by so much documentation that at times it is in danger of sinking beneath its own weight. He should have paid more attention to the significance of his findings instead of teasing the reader with so much unprocessed information.

## Cuckoo-Pint

A brown matchstick held up in the wind,  
the bract-leaf cupped around it like a palm.

March had not extinguished it: there it lurked,  
sly as something done behind the sheds,

slithering from its half-unrolled umbrella  
as we snipped pussy-willow from the lanes.

To come instead on this old man of the woods,  
tanned and cowed and clammed inside his collar,

his shirt-front splattered with tobacco stains,  
his poker oozy with tuber-froth,

was like learning by accident a secret  
intended for us later, exciting

and obscene and not to be gone back on,  
like the knowledge of atoms or death.

BLAKE MORRISON

# Life's reckoning

Alexander Murray

J. A. BURROW  
The Ages of Man: A study in medieval writing  
and thought  
211pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £19.50.  
0198111886

Death comes to everyone; and since "the time of death is every moment" the same goes for the experience of passing through the successive stages in life, from infancy onwards – unless, that is, a man dies before his time. The main difference is that we pass through these infinitesimal "deaths", unlike the big one, conscious after the event as well as before. Because the experience is attached to the human condition with a necessity reborn with every infant, no one can be surprised that it commands a big literature. The literature starts from a time long, long before Shakespeare's *Jaques*, in *As You Like It*, gave his own variant in his speech about the seven ages.

To say that those seven ages, like much else in Shakespeare, belonged to the medieval world-picture, is to make only one mistake. There was no single medieval world-picture. There were several, and J. A. Burrow would have had to write a thinner book if there had not been. For his purpose in *The Ages of Man* is to rehearse the various medieval views there were on human age, as shown in surviving works written in England (mostly in English but with a few from Latin writers like Bede), with liberal excursions into their classical sources and French and Italian analogues. (The latter include some French epic and romance and, for Italy, Dante and Petrarch.)

The result is the work of a thorough professional, so thorough that Professor Burrow knows how to write for readers who are not. For instance, quotations in Latin, Old English, Old and Middle French, and Italian, are translated, leaving readers with only the complication of having to pick their way through Middle English. If the author's professionalism does impart any flaw, it lies in the book's English concentration. This reflects the structure of modern universities with their English departments, rather than any radical English peculiarities in the subject. Peculiarities there were, like a reverence for age in *Beowulf* and other Old English literature, modified by a cult of youth emanating from early twelfth-century France. But these are not radical enough to make the ages of man in England a subject on its own. The English limitation is only justified by the vastness of the subject: professors share other human limitations besides age.

What then do the medieval authors tell us? I have mentioned Jaques's "seven ages", so let me start with them. Although medieval and indeed classical in ancestry, the sevenfold scheme of ages was in fact a sophisticated late-comer to both classical and medieval culture. It was astronomical, and its attraction was that it associated human ages with the seven so-called planets, not inappropriately. The moon went with infancy, Mercury with the schoolboy, the sun for early manhood, Mars for discontented later manhood, dignified Jupiter for the late fifties and early sixties, and Saturn for grumbling old age. Medieval Europe got the scheme from late Greek astronomy. In particular from Ptolemy of Alexandria's *Tetrabiblos*. This was only translated around 1140, and even then its influence would be stronger in art than in literature, until the Renaissance. Visitors to Longthorpe Tower near Peterborough can see an example of the sevenfold scheme from around 1330, painted on a wall.

The older medieval schemes were independent of Greek astronomy. They drew simple, unlearned analogies between human ages and other time-periods in the natural environment. The simplest of all was with the day. Life had its dawn, daylight and dusk; or (in one scheme, reminiscent of the first line of our "Abide with me") its four "tides". Liturgists made each of the canonical hours an invitation to reflect on an appropriate stage in life. Another comparison made each day equivalent to a year of life, so that life was represented by a series of days, ideally three-score-and-ten, split up into groups of seven years which the proponents of the system called "year-weeks". Traditionally going back to Hippocrates, and still alive in our custom of treating people as "grow-up-at-

twenty-one, this scheme brought the number of human ages to ten ( $7 \times 10 = 70$ ). This was handy enough if you were a liturgist and could see life as a Septuagesima, but otherwise too cumbersome to become general.

Of schemes thus based on the calendar the one that did come nearest to becoming general was that which compared life not with a day, or ten weeks, but to a year and its four seasons. Our own four seasons are a last, isolated relic of a scheme ultimately Pythagorean, all based on fours. (Would we otherwise have thought there were four seasons? Certainly not in 1986.) The scheme associated the four seasons with four human ages, as part of an intricate analogy between natural macrocosm and human microcosm. It was Bede, arithmetical Bede, who gave the notion its *locus classicus* in his book on time-reckoning. Seasons, ages, elements and humours are there all interlinked. Thus children are moist and hot (like spring, blood and the element of air); youths, while remaining hot, are dry (like summer, "red cholera" and the element of fire); mature men, dry and cold (like autumn, earth and "black choler"); while phlegmatic old men, like winter and water, are cold and moist – or "cauld and snoffly" as the Old English *Manual* of Byrthferth put it. Byrthferth added a diagram (first of twelve informative plates in Burrow's book), in which the four already itemized are joined by four winds, four points of the year (at equinoxes and solstices) and by three-times-four months and signs of the zodiac. It is all very appealing.

It is appealing because it tries to reduce the baffling diversity of experience to a unity. It tries impatiently: with half-a-dozen more centuries of failures behind it, modern science is more hesitant, and in that sense the scheme of Byrthferth (which others copied and amended) is characteristically medieval. But it is still not a single world-picture. It was not even consistent with itself. Some of its devotees, for instance, made babies cold and wet instead of hot and wet, and this sent a shift through the entire system, leaving (for instance) old men cold but now dry (not snoffly). There was also the small matter of what babies and old men were really like. The more closely philosophers observed external reality, the more severely the symmetry of the "fours" was put to the test.

This test was stood better by another, less tightly numerical, scheme. The biggest of the external time-patterns invoked as an analogue with human life was the pattern of human history. A comparison on this scale called for a mind of exceptional power. It was provided by St Augustine. Building on a Jewish tradition of interpreting the six days of creation, Augustine saw human history as divided into six ages, five occupying the Old Testament, the sixth beginning with the birth of Christ. He compared these six ages with six in human life, deliberately avoiding part, at least, of the numbering problem by allowing the sixth age to continue, if necessary, as long as the others put together (that is, from the age of 60 to that of 120). Among marks of Augustine's influence thus would be a commonplace of medieval writing, the idea that the world is in its "old age".

"Divide and rule", then, proved as useful an intellectual principle as it ever was a political. Those schemes of four, six, seven and ten ages helped men grapple with the elusive reality of human growth. Perhaps some of the numbers also related – though this is not Burrow's subject – to social-anthropological customs, like twenty-first birthday parties, which regulate relations between different age-groups. From the scientific point of view, however, human life is too untidy an affair, both in length and in other respects, to be housed in a neat system of numbers; and it is significant that the philosopher who proved, from the late thirteenth century, most influential of all should be the one who had contented himself with the simplest and least numerical scheme. This was Aristotle. The great Greek naturalist had merely observed, in the matter of human ages, that like all living things men had a period of growth and a period of decline, with a period of full development, or *senectus* (*senec*), between. Avicenna and other medical authorities inherited this idea, one of whose merits was that it went with a high quality of observation. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, for instance, translated into Latin around 1270 and partially available through other authors (notably Giles of

Rome), has a long thumb-nail sketch of youth. The following compression gives the flavour:

Young men have strong passions, and tend to gratify them indiscriminately. Of the bodily desires, it is the sexual by which they are most swayed. While they love honour, they love victory still more. They love both more than they love money, which indeed they love very little, not having yet learnt what it means to be without it. They look at the good side rather than the bad. They are easily cheated. They have exalted notions, because they have not yet been humbled by life or learnt its necessary limitations. Their lives are regulated more by moral feeling than by reason. They think they know everything, and they overdo everything. If they do wrong to others, it is because they mean to insult them, not to do them actual harm.

And so on. Old people are in most respects the opposite: cynical (tending to put the worst construction on things); humbled by life; interested mainly in what will help keep them alive, and "careful of money because experience has taught them how hard it is to get and how easy to lose". Middle age, accordingly, provided Aristotle with his Golden Mean.

Aristotle thus set his late medieval readers a high standard in psychological observation. He made a second contribution to their thought. Because of the idea of nature as moral criterion, Aristotle strengthened the moral dimension of the medieval doctrine of ages. By this I mean the idea that each age has its appropriate code of conduct. Proof of Aristotle's effect is Dante's *Convivio*, where this idea is explicit and draws heavily on the *Ethics*. But its germ was implicit in much of the literature from before then. The proverb "jeune saint, vieux diable", for instance, well known from long before, implied that youngsters should not usurp pious aspirations only appropriate to age – a view hotly contested by religious instructors. Worse still was the undevout old man, the "sinner of a hundred years old" whom a Vulgate mistranslation of Isaiah 65:20 held to be "accursed". His extreme manifestation was the *senex amans*, deprecated by writers religious and

secular, and even by the illiterates of his village with their "rough music".

All Western medieval writers quoted in Burrow's book were sound, orthodox Christians. Yet the reader, on finishing the book, cannot fail to reflect how little Christ comes into it. Was not Christianity meant to signal a conquest of death, the background and terminus of all those ages? It is true that gospel parables were often quoted (especially the parables of the Wage-earners in the Vineyard, and of the Returning Master). Christ's earthly life was also adduced by Dante and others as a model for the conduct appropriate to each age; in particular, the young Jesus was the ideal *puer senex*, a type of precociously wise child admired in both hagiography and epic (in different circles, that is, from those who muttered the proverb "young saint, old devil"). But Christ did not live beyond the mid-point of human life – a fact which drew idiosyncratic comment from Dante – and any specifically Christian doctrine on old age is remarkable, among these authors, only for its absence.

The absence is put in relief by the main exception: in St Augustine. In drawing his comparison between human ages and (on one hand) the days of creation, and (on the other) the ages of human history, Augustine had had plenty to say of his sixty-years-long *senectus*. The exterior man declines, he had said. But for the interior man it is a time of *renovatio*, when the soul recovers the divine likeness which was implanted in it on the sixth day of creation. Isidore of Seville – *Saint* Isidore – in transferring the Augustinian scheme to his *Etymologies* in the sixth century, left this bit out; and none of the other writers on age found anything among the classics on their bookshelves to move them to put it back. When a man's natural life was all but over, in other words, these classicizers left him as a tattered coat upon a stick, *cauld and snoffly*, sans everything, with no hint that he might, if all went well, have the best bit of life still in front of him.

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# The price of moderation

John Lloyd

JIM PRIOR  
A Balance of Power  
278pp. Hamish Hamilton. £12.95.  
0241 11957X

The trouble with "social", or "wet", Conservatism – whose only exponent today at Cabinet level is Peter Walker – is that it simply took too much for granted. As Jim Prior tells us in his book *The Balance of Power*, when Margaret Thatcher won the leadership of the Conservative Party in February 1975, he and his fellow "wets" imagined they could control her: "we did not fully appreciate at first that she was the strong and determined leader which she subsequently turned out to be"; and again, "those of us in Cabinet who were out of sympathy with Margaret's views grossly underestimated her absolute determination, along with Geoffrey [Howe] and Keith [Joseph] to push through the new right wing policies"; and still again, the deepest failure of all, "I failed to recognise... that the mood of the country had changed during the 1970s and it was ready for a more radical move to the right than in 1970... Margaret had caught the new mood. She was more in tune with the people than I was."

In taking both Thatcher and the people for granted, the "wets" betrayed their anachronistic side. Prior, whose speciality in the 1970s and early 1980s was industrial relations, remained wedded to the belief that the trade-union movement was a social partner which had to be placated by Conservatives and that it must not be pushed too hard. He failed to share Mrs Thatcher's fundamental perception: that the split between the unions and the 1974-9 Labour Government and the former's destruction of the latter in the 1978/9 "winter of discontent" gave an incoming Tory Government the chance for which four or five years of monetarist training had prepared them: the chance to drive home the message that the unions were unworthy to form the basis of a government (as Labour had tried to make them), to weaken the strength of organized labour and to detach it as far as possible from the Labour Party. This I take to be the real goal of Thatcherism, and a brilliantly successful project it has been.

Prior's social vision, as his title suggests, is one in which the social partners exert enough influence over their own constituencies to be able to balance each other at the top. As Employment Secretary in Margaret Thatcher's first Cabinet, he naturally saw his job as encouraging whatever efforts moderate trade union leaders were making to hold back an all-out assault on the Government's economic policy. "Strident statements by ministers could only undermine them [the moderates]. I did not want my consultations with the TUC on union reforms wrecked, nor did I want to see the creation of a confrontationalist atmosphere on economic policy. I might as well have saved my breath."

He might indeed. The posture of the Prime

Minister was uniformly hostile to moderate and radical alike: she had no time for the corporatism in which they wished to operate in private amity with Tory ministers (there is a revealing photograph in the book, showing Clive Jenkins, leader of the white-collar workers' union, Tom Jackson, then leader of the Post Office workers, and Prior all laughing a bit too heartily at a Jenkins sally). She preferred an atomistic to a corporate society, and realized that the time was propitious for throwing the unions out of the corridors of power. Elsewhere (in a Channel Four interview for the series *The Writing on the Wall*), Prior has confessed his failure to appreciate how fast anti-union legislation could be pushed without provoking a serious backlash.

He also failed in Northern Ireland: no surprise, though the period obviously affected him deeply, and haunts him still. He did not grasp the emotional depth of Protestant fundamentalism, and was clearly repelled by it: he appears to have found the windy nationalism of the Catholic SDLP more congenial. He could not make the Northern Ireland Assembly work, and rejected direct rule (the only policy which, when Roy Mason administered it in the late 1970s, actually succeeded in consistently reducing terrorism) on the flimsy ground that it did not assist in bringing two fundamentally

divided communities together. He does not even moot the possibility that they cannot be brought together to co-operate in a state whose validity one community's political leaders continually, if in many cases peacefully, reject: it is here, perhaps, that his moderation becomes dogmatic.

The greater part of the book, dealing with the Thatcher period, is simply full of failure. "Perhaps my own approach", he writes at the end, "has been too paternalistic and reserved, but then my roots are deep in the English countryside where change does not come quickly." He is paternalistic: he idealizes a certain kind of working class, decent, hard-working and patriotic. Lacking the ambition of Michael Heseltine, he chose to retire from politics: lacking the intellectual drive of Sir Ian Gilmour, he has written a book which is less enlightening than puzzled about the reasons that impelled him to do so.

He does manage, though, to paint an attractive picture of himself – probably without consciously trying. He unselfconsciously expresses love for his wife. He does not attempt to justify himself, though he is clear where he stands. Prior is not an exciting writer, but he has a wry humour which must have sustained him and which helps sustain his writing. His descriptions are very good at times: Thatcher, the

heroine/villain of the piece, gets many good lines:

"The *Guardian* had reported that she had developed a 'sexy' voice in a radio programme. In fact, she had been deliberate on her part, but the result, day or two later, I said 'Margaret, I read in my paper that you have developed a 'sexy' voice'. Back to her reply. 'What makes you think I wasn't sexy before?'"

He blames himself (again) for male chauvinism, in finding it difficult to stomach Mrs Thatcher's abrasiveness because it came from a woman. It is intriguing that many of those who have left her Cabinet were the most gallant, and thus the least able to accept a woman as accepting gallantry. Jim Prior's account at least raises the possibility that this may have underlain some of the "wet"/"dry" strains.

Yet obvious decency has not been enough. He is convincing in his view that Thatcher cannot last: whoever her successor is, he (or she) will not be in the mould. But he certainly bears the marks: Thatcherism is coincided with, and helped to shape, a certain disintegration in the social forms and attitudes in which the "wets" had fitted, now they can no longer. *A Balance of Power* is not a vision, but a threnody.

running of the ship, and he could hardly have approved the extreme severity of his former wife's régime. (It is ironic that Fry died from the job a presumed authority on matters of discipline, something which would touch upon subsequent life hardly at all.) He needed to do more. Clive Ellis's recent biography (*B. discloses that in 1929 Fry suffered complete mental collapse, which his wife drily ascribed to "thwarted genius", and which crippled him for five years. This information supports the coy justifications of Fry's own "Life's Work" chapter:*

Once, standing in the *Mercury* rose garden at Harefield, Lord Birkenhead said to me, "This is a lovely place and a fine show, C. B. But for you it has been backwater."

"The question remains," I replied, "whether it is better to be successful or... happy."

This Lord Birkenhead was one of Fry's personal Oxford (a band of fabulous achievers in youth and maturity – says Fry of one, "I hope he is as good a Regius Professor as he was a footballer"). His later status as Cabinet Minister and Lord Chancellor provokes the ever-competitive Fry into childish exhumation of his rival's Second Class in Finals without explaining, or mentioning, his own stress-induced Fourth). There is an element of weak repudiation here for a biographer's jibe, that of the two Varsity pals, Fry went on to make runs while E. Smith (as he then was) went on to make history. That Fry tried belatedly to emulate Birkenhead in his own sphere of "success", standing and falling three times as a Liberal candidate for Parliament in his suddenly cracked fifties, goes unrecorded here; Fry wouldn't have understood how failure could be interesting, any more than he considered his own mental illness or marital arrangements the business of a world of admirers.

It is hard to believe, anyway, that a mind so conditioned to games-playing could have achieved the eminence in twentieth-century politics that, it is sometimes thought, might have been his, but for the lure of cricket. For example, Fry's view of History is of a Great Match between the Nations whose losers (everybody else) are awarded what he calls uncomplicatedly "the enormous blessing of the *Pax Britannica*". In recent times, though, public-school stock has deteriorated, and the right combination of instinctive nationalism and shaven-haired physio-culture is to be found rather in Nazi Germany, which Fry visited in 1934, and celebrates here in a chapter he was too stubborn ever to revise. He is star-struck by the person of the Führer, whom he describes as "fresh and fit" and "alert" like an Aussie shipper who has got his lads into good fettle. Fry's proud values have stiffened into dotty anachronism. Jesse Owens had already proved that even amateur sportmen now had something to run against.



more than a sports book, though it is reprinted by the Pavilion Library in their series of cricket classics; it enshrines the author's fantasy of himself as the wholly versatile man grown out of the champion youth. The subtitle is *Some phases of an Englishman*; and the sports are only the earliest in a series of dazzling accomplishments (journalism, diplomacy, hunting, ballroom dancing and so on) which follow one another like inevitable casual hundreds to make a "Life" that is (still) structurally closer to a boys' comic than it is to candid autobiography.

Yet the incongruous title of one chapter or "phase" – "A Life's Work", dealing with his command of the training-ship *Mercury* – hints at an alternative and more melancholy pattern of aspiration and achievement, one that has been plotted in two recent biographical studies of Fry. Cricket could be a "life's work" for the professional player, who might sell score-cards or supervise school nets when his own joints gave way; but for the amateur it was meant to be a diversion. Even in recent years, players in the amateur tradition – May, Sheppard, Dexter, Brearley – have retired from the game in their prime to pursue an adult vocation. Fry, on the other hand, and for all his vaunted intellect, was opening the batting for his adopted Hampshire and pressing for a recall to the 1921 England side at the age of forty-nine; for fun, of course, which suggests that his "Life's Work" wasn't serious enough.

He came to the *Mercury* as part of his convenient marriage to Bessie Sumner, which gave him the wherewithal and the leisure to play amateur cricket, and gave her relief from the scandal of her affair with the ship's founder, Charles Hoare-the-banker. In fact, as a former pupil, Ronald Morris, recalled in his *The Captain's Lady* (1984), Fry took little part in the

# The sunken showboat

E. S. Turner

MICHAEL DAVIE  
The Titanic: The full story of a tragedy  
345pp. Bodley Head. £12.95.  
0370 30764 X

Michael Davie describes the Titanic as "a metaphor for the human predicament". Few of us would rush to define the human predicament, but the Titanic was certainly a metaphor for human arrogance. This alone would justify the regular retelling of the disaster of 1912, in which 1,522 lives were lost (the equivalent of four packed jumbo jets flying simultaneously into the Pyrenees).

It is a tale which revives horrific, half-forgotten images, like that of hundreds of passengers huddled on the multi-tiered stern falling away, singly or in clusters, as the vessel begins its vertical dive; or that of survivors in half-filled lifeboats finding reasons for not returning to the disaster scene. It is the tale of a captain who becomes a hero by going down with his ship and an owner who becomes a pariah for not doing so.

Mr Davie is content to approach the story as an investigative reporter and his fair and well-ordered account does him credit. He broods over the old slipway in Belfast where the vessel took shape and the cemetery in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the dead were landed and embalmed. He visits a Titanic museum in Philadelphia and the oceanographic base on Cape Cod, where the successful expedition to find the wreck was mounted. In the main he does not quarrel with the findings of the two official inquiries, one British, one American. The simple truth is that the iceberg had the right of way and the ship was steaming too fast, in the robust custom of the time. There were lifeboats for only half the ship's complement, but these were enough to satisfy Board of Trade regulations. The mystery of why the near-by Californian failed to respond to distress rockets remains, as ever, opaque.

The Titanic was a British-operated liner financed by American capital, a situation which produced much venom. Davie stresses the bitter rivalry, social, industrial and political,

then prevailing between the "effete" Old World and the thrusting New (incidentally, their behaviour during the sinking showed that American multi-millionaires aboard were more than capable of doing the decent thing). The author may find himself alone in detecting a resemblance between the wreck of the Titanic and the Westland affair, with British ministers exercised at predatory American attitudes in the industrial field.

As a newsman he is struck by the waywardness of the Marconi operators on the rescue vessels who, for days of raging anxiety on both sides of the ocean, ignored press queries and gave priority to private messages of survivors. Nevertheless the wireless service had helped to save 700 lives and Marconi shares soared. This was a good thing for Sir Rufus Isaacs, the Attorney-General, who had just bought that notorious holding in the American Marconi company. As he did not declare his interest to the British Titanic inquiry, the speech he should have made is drafted for him by Davie.

Bernard Shaw worked up a fine lather over "romantic lying" by the newspapers. The "first demand of romance in a shipwreck", he said, was "women and children first"; men must not enter the boats even to row them (many of the crew could not row anyway). Is it indecent to wonder, in these changed times, whether this first demand of romance still survives? Suppose that the Queen Elizabeth II were calamitously holed while carrying 500 feminists to a convention, would these ladies, normally resentful of being offered seats by gentlemen, resist attempts by the ship's officers to hurry them into the boats?

Sir Osbert Sitwell thought the Titanic was "a symbol of the approaching fate of Western Civilisation". Nobody, not even Michael Davie in this wide-ranging book, ever mentions the fate, no less symbolic, of the Empress of Ireland, which went down in a collision in fog off Newfoundland early in 1914 with the loss of more than a thousand, a large number of whom were Salvation Army officers. After the First World War began, spiritualists claimed that the sinking was divinely arranged, so that a draft of godly men trained to handle suffering would be ready on the Other Side to process the Flanders dead. Shaw missed his chance there.

## Frontiersmen at sea

James Hunter

A. ALVAREZ  
Offshore: A North Sea Journey  
191pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £9.95.  
0340 37347 4

So far, writing on the North Sea oil industry consists of little more than a mass of technical manuals and half a dozen indifferent thrillers. This is a frontier which has still to produce its Fenimore Cooper or its Jack London; a frontier, for that matter, of which most British people remain curiously unaware. A. Alvarez has set out to produce what has been missing: an account of how the offshore oil boom seems to those caught up in it. The result is competent, perceptive and convincing.

Offshore is not a frontiersman's book. The twelve-hour shifts and the fortnight-long tours of duty that make the typical oilman's wages harder earned than most, do not lend themselves to creative writing. But in the absence of a routabout or roughneck equivalent of *Songs of a Sourdough*, external reportage of the Alvarez kind is as close as we are likely to get to how it feels to live and work on the wave-battered steel structures that are the ultimate source of the revenues at present safeguarding Britain from renewed financial crisis.

To the extent, though, that *Offshore* is an outsider's view of the North Sea oil industry – an exercise in the better and more imaginative sort of journalism, an assemblage of facts, conversation and opinion – it is a superficial book. It does not question the claims made on the offshore industry's behalf. It does not seek to analyse that industry's treatment of its work-force or its impact on the Scottish communities which it has so substantially altered. But it

gives its readers access to the men – for the offshore business is an exclusively male preserve – on whom the industry depends: the helicopter pilots, divers, geologists, production managers, tool-pushers, engineers and labourers who populate the scores of artificial islands now to be found between Scotland and Norway.

Theirs is not the rip-roaring existence of the Klondyke. The rigs are bereft of both women and booze. And the ideal oilman, it emerges, has just left the army and is still used to doing what he is told; a circumstance which – given the generally low correlation between literary talent and conformity – may explain the oil boom's inability to produce the sort of writing that emerged from earlier scramblings after the kind of wealth now being obtained from the North Sea.

The men whom Alvarez meets offshore are not in any way exotic. They do not wear, for the most part, ten-gallon hats and high-heeled boots. Often they are former factory workers who have been made redundant, usually they are bored, tired and decidedly unheroic. And this book's chapters on them ring truer than the other chapters which deal with onshore localities like Aberdeen and Shetland, where Alvarez makes the mistake of neglecting the ordinary inhabitants, highlighting instead the careers and attitudes of the unrepresentative minority who have done very well out of the oil boom.

This book is to be recommended to anyone who wishes to obtain some insight into the offshore oil business. It is a consequence of the oil industry's inherent volatility rather than the fault of its author that, since it was written, oil prices have plummeted below ten dollars a barrel and the talk in Aberdeen today is of lost jobs and property that will not sell.

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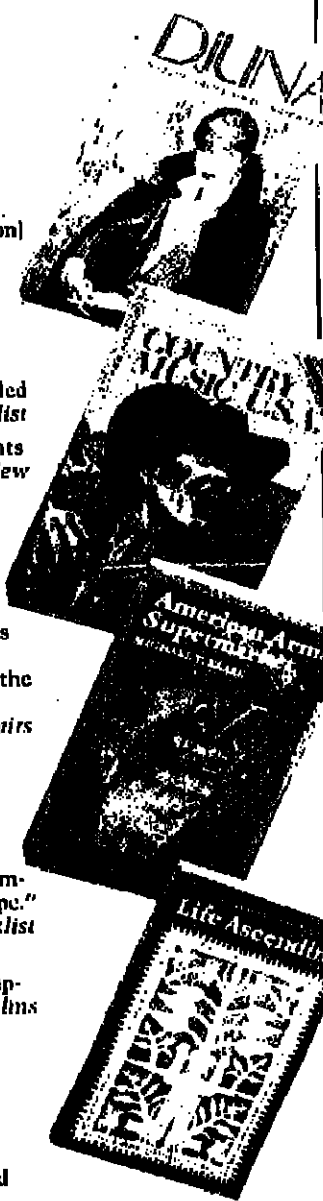
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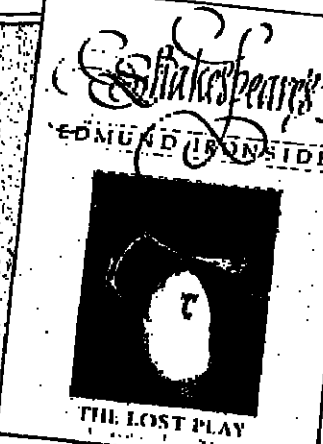
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## Letters from Prison

And Other Essays

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UNIVERSITY OF California PRESS  
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# Return to the divided city

Anne Boston

BLANCHER D'ALPUGET  
Winter in Jerusalem  
269pp. Secker and Warburg. £9.95.  
0436 121506

Blanche d'Alpuget is an Australian journalist, the biographer of Australia's prime minister Bob Hawke, and a novelist with a penchant for exotic locations which reflect her background as a foreign correspondent. Two earlier, stylish newspaper novels, *Monkeys in the Dark* and *Turtle Beach*, were set in Malaysia and Indonesia respectively; each showed the atmospheric sense of place and acute political insight which also characterize *Winter in Jerusalem*. Here d'Alpuget's post-feminist heroine, Danielle Green, puts up a good fight for ascendancy over her own insecurities and the book's indecisive structure; but the divided city itself is finally the real protagonist.

Israel after the bloody incursion into Lebanon hovers in a "fine, hell-like balance", threatened within and without by every shade of racial and religious extremism. Political argument is as endemic as the faded Israeli rudeness. The city is serviced by watchful Arabs; every stray carrier bag could hold a bomb. Processions of nunscrawls on their knees down the Via Dolorosa, calling down judgment on the murderers of Christ; Hasidic Jews refuse to let women sully the seats beside them on buses, and woe betide the unwary visitor who finds herself in Arab-occupied East Jerusalem at nightfall on the Sabbath, when transport closes down.

The visitor in question is Danielle, an Australian scriptwriter returning to her birthplace to research a Hollywood megabuck movie, *Elezor*, about the siege and mass suicide of the Jewish Zealots at Masada – the parallels with Israel's embattled state are all too clear. But she's also on a personal quest, to trace the father whose violence she fled with her mother thirty years earlier.

Any hopes for easy money and a joyful reconciliation are quickly dashed. Danielle's father turns out to be a Jewish supremacist with

unsavory political connections, who denies his daughter's existence and hides behind his female amanuensis, a born-again Christian unduly referred to by Danielle as Christ's honey bun. The unreal, inflated movie world is equally elusive, as well as dangerous: Danielle has hired a photographer acquaintance without knowing of his Palestinian loyalties. Bennie, the director, is a crooked Jewish-American whizz-kid who changes all her plans and makes her feel terminally inadequate. A long-awaited affair with him alters nothing; as soon as she is safely back in Australia he steals her storyline, sacks her for refusing to change the film's ending, and marries his chief creditor.

Danielle's old teacher and mentor, Alice, describes her as "an authentic example of late twentieth-century Western woman, reared in prosperity at a forced pace. The process left them glossy... but undeveloped within." This manifests itself chiefly in a reprehensible tendency to go mushy over the opposite sex. If Danielle comes across as a composite and sometimes tentative creation, this is partly the result of a fractured structure which suddenly switches from the author's narration to Danielle's first-person account in the final section. This takes her (via an oddly extraneous domestic crisis) back to Israel after her father's death. Her involvement with Amos, a pugnacious first-generation Israeli, allows the author to bring in the painful dilemma of an immigrant older generation watching the spread of disillusionment in its children – and the surfacing of the terrorist link which has been lurking all along.

This is an enjoyable book, its untidy web of subplots and characters sustained by vivid observation and the energy of the writing. The thriller element has to compete as best it can with the theme of modern woman trying to find independence and fulfillment on her own. To a narrative already thick with events, the author can't resist adding a rich layer of incidental portage in the form of dozens of minor encounters with soldiers, hairdressers, bus passengers, supper party guests. The result, messy and vital, is an even-handed, illuminating portrait of a city, and a people, enmeshed in centuries of religious, emotional and tribal conflict and waiting for the fall.

# Attention-seeker's tale

Katherine Bucknell

KATE GRENVILLE  
Lillian's Story  
227pp. Viking. £9.95.  
0670 809292

Natives of Sydney might recognize the central character in *Lillian's Story* as Bea Miles, a large, loony woman who used to jump into their taxi cabs and recite Shakespeare at them, then go home at night to sleep in the park. In her first novel, Kate Grenville imagines a past life for this woman (familiar in some form to us all), whom she calls Lillian Singer. The narration is direct and simple, well suited to presenting childhood and adolescence. Grenville's descriptions are eccentric but concise, and make vivid the conflict between Lillian's useful desires and the restraints of genteel family life. But as *Lillian's Story* develops, its simplicity seems increasingly a limitation; the range of tones narrows, themes, and images are repeated, and the novel becomes relentlessly depressing.

From birth, Lillian does not matter: not to her vague, invalid mother, still less to her nervous, authoritarian father. She is determined to have it otherwise, and will do anything for attention. She stands on her head; she swings upside down from the jacaranda tree shrieking "Father, look!", but he just leaves her swinging there. So Lillian turns to eating, and this becomes a form of rebellion. Her growing bulk defies her father's beatings: "there is too much flesh for him now".

Sadly, Lillian's insatiable appetite – for attention and for food – disables her for life. At school she is resented, laughed at and bullied. As a young lady she fails to attract the suitors to whom her parents look for relief. So her father sends her to university. There, Lillian blooms.

She has girlfriends and boyfriends; she thrills to the pleasures of mutual affection and physical love.

Then her story falters. She finds herself unable to tell anyone precisely what happened when her father (fascinated by the sex organs of horses and pigs) found her alone in the empty house, naked before her mother's bedroom mirror. She runs away to the bush, and when she returns she withdraws from life at the university and from her friends. She refuses the long-awaited proposal of marriage. Later, she insists on her virginity and on remaining "chaste".

Disgusted by her, Lillian's father sends her to the "loony-bin" where she spends ten frighteningly serene years grasping at the attention of inmates and nurses. Eventually she is rescued, and forces herself on people she meets in the street. At first it's prostitutes and tramps, eventually it's bankers and housewives. Lillian assures herself that they'll always remember and tell their families and friends about the public scenes into which she traps them. Nothing would have made her happier than to have Kate Grenville write this novel about her; whether we can be happy reading it is another matter.

An eleven-week series of lecture discussions, "Consuming Fictions", began at the ICA on October 6. The discussions run every Monday from 7.30 to 9.00 pm in the ICA Seminar Room, ICA, The Mall, London SW1; tickets are £2 each plus ICA day pass (60p), or the entire course can be booked for £20. Among the topics to be discussed at the remaining ten weeks' lectures are "Representations of the Nation in Popular Writing"; "Romance"; "Sexual Politics and Science Fiction"; "Narratives of Fashion"; "Crime and Fiction: Social Fantasy and Psychic Law and Order"; and "Black Writing". Further details from the ICA Box Office.

# Sink, swim or shim

Mark Sanderson

TIM WINTON  
Shallows  
235pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £9.95.  
0297 789279

Angelus, the last whaling town in Australia, is preparing for its sesquicentenary. The Queen and her "natty" husband are going to visit – even Rolf Harris might come. However, before these celebrities appear on the horizon, a group of unwelcome visitors arrives: Cachalot and Company, professional conservationists. The locals are outraged – whaling means jobs – but one, the independent Queenie Cookson, deserts her husband, Cleve, to join the other side. While she is away Cleve neglects himself and reads the bizarre journal of one of her ancestors, Nathaniel Coupar, who was a member of an ill-fated whaling expedition in 1831. The conservationists don't have much luck either, and after Queenie sinks their chances by saving a famous sharkfisher from drowning in full view of the media circus, they capitulate. Disillusioned with her taste of radicalism, a pregnant Queenie returns to Cleve and scrubs the kitchen floor.

There is much fascinating information here about whales (the testes of the sperm whale can weigh up to 100 lbs each), and the attempts of the conservationists in their vulnerable rubber

dinghies to prevent the whaling vessels performing their vile and unnecessary operations are exciting. Tim Winton's novel is no more about whales, though, than is *Moby-Dick*. Apparently whales, intelligent beings like humans, are unfathomable and occasionally commit suicide. Winton's spare prose is heavy with compassion for those stranded in the shallow. Winton takes dirty realism to a new extreme, and seems to derive a gratuitous gratification from squalor. Blood – from the slaughtered whales, from violence and menstruation – swirls through the narrative along with a tidal sweat, semen and excrement. When Queenie's grandfather first meets his bride they spend time vomiting up a bag of sugar together. Queenie stays in a boarding house where the mattress smells of urine and "the headwinds were crusty with nosepickings and squashed insects". "Spitballs" splat everywhere. This is a queasy-making read.

At one point the names of the characters are confused and there is some weird copy-editing "handful" for "handfuls" and "mundane" for "mundanity". What is "shimming"? K. matter, *Shallows* is, ultimately, an impressive novel. An entire community with its crooked businessmen, bored spinsters and outcast aborigines is admirably evoked. Individuals, each burdened by memories and torments, dreams, are vividly realized; but what lags most in the mind is the skillfully sustained atmosphere of indefinable menace. *The Shallows* echo with a sense of inner desolation.

# Front line of a phoney war

Neville Shack

MAX APPLE  
Free Agents  
197pp. Faber. £9.95.  
0371 138427  
The Oranging of America  
152pp. Faber. Paperback, £3.95.  
0571 139744

Max Apple writes from the front line of private citizenship. Life out there usually falls short of well-being, but disenchantment is modulated into a whimsy which then serves to anaesthetize pain. The writer's unease makes its impression; his tone is mildly satirical. His connected America, as shown in these two collections of short stories, might suggest nice dramas: a domesticity with tears, as if small helpings of ruefulness and tricks of irony could be magnified into something more searing. Instead, we have tame sentiments chasing the spirit of travesty. The risk of succumbing to caricature is obvious; perhaps with this in mind, Apple manages to unsettle expectations before his inevitable conformity takes effect. The front line looks out on a phoney war, quite homely in its false climaxes.

*Free Agents* (the later book of the two) generates a few sparks when the author, a glad candidate for self-abatement, acknowledges the absurdity of his illusions. This marking down may be a vocational matter; Apple's professionalism as a writer is generously turned into an issue, with ironic effect. "An Offering" gives us a corporate prospectus, trying to tempt investors to buy a stake in Max Apple, Inc. Honesty is at more of a premium here than any other asset: an exercise in hard sell which yet carries soft, slightly hesitant opinions about the worth of the offer. "The Company" constantly risks lapsing into journalism or screen writing or silence. Apple impulsively plays autobiography off against the market-place, but the mode of presenting himself here as a proposition corresponds too closely to the assessments of an author made by the commercial publishing trade. The parody is half-discounted in advance, and loses much of its forcefulness.

Apple entertains thoughts of two almost separate personae for himself: the writer and the man. "The American Bakery" testifies to this consciously bifocal view. Fiction, he says, is like a ventriloquist's dummy; getting all the best lines; while he himself can continue to be the straight man, modest and silent. In context, this distinction appears like an attempt to disarm the reader who would prefer the narrative,

to be more integrated and authoritative. The evocations of family life stand up well enough with typical lapses into sentimentality. The strain of humble submission to work also nately for and against the narrative. Apple reports on how arduous this writing business

An awkward hesitant clumsy sentence emerges I nurse it, love it in all its distress. I see in it the hopes of an entire narrative, the suggestion of the future time. I write a second sentence and then I cross out that first one as if it never existed. This infidelity to rhythm, voice, finally style itself.

Apple makes a fair stylistic virtue out of his uncertainty, enriching the rhythm and tempo, but also letting the awkward authorial voice grate. He is more convincing and entertaining when he controls that nervousness in the prose, managing to blacken the humour a little. The title story of *Free Agents* has him locked in struggle with his body, as it subverts the very natural wish for a healthy life. After a series of altercations with his spleen and brain, the author goes before a tribunal to plead the case against a strong challenge. Where the ghost spars with the machine there is some bizarre potential. "Walt and Will" builds itself around an interesting fancy, that the famous pioneer of animation was in many ways subservient to the elder, more thrusting Disney brother. We learn, among other things, that Walt first saw *Dumbo* only at its commercial release because he had prominent ears himself, and his brother didn't want to risk offending him.

The title story of *The Oranging of America* is steeped in the faddishness that works marketing wonders for twentieth-century pioneers. Howard Johnson and his faithful companion Mildred, prospect for the sites of new motels. Their America is a heavily sanitized version of the dusty continent trodden underfoot. Mildred dreams of being frozen alive so that she can taste the future in due course, after being thawed out; Howard appears both entrepreneurial and faceless. Spot the correspondence between the neat micro-climate of the motels and the deep-frozen necropolis. These are soft targets, handled with something less than reverence, but also with something far blunter than the edge required by the subject.

This earlier volume, though, is shot through with a guttiness that has since turned mawkish. The fictions generally labour their sense of absurdity, trying hard to project clever, wacky and skittish touches. "Inside Norman Mailer" trades writers' quips with gusto. The self-regard oozes as well as exasperates, but, ultimately, neither reaction will satisfy the reader who is looking for more than a series of good-natured gags.

# A rage for order

Patricia Craig

JOHN BANVILLE  
Mefisto  
233pp. Secker and Warburg. £9.95.  
0436 03266 X

The hero of John Banville's novel *Birchwood* (1973) is called Gabriel Godkin, and he's looking for his missing twin. This twin motif keeps recurring in Banville's work. In *Mefisto*, another quest novel, another Gabriel – Gabriel Swan – misses the ghostly twin, his embryonic *Doppelgänger*, who didn't survive his exposure to a new element: "He drowned in air." The dualistic character of the new novel, with its positive and negative elements, is established straight away. "Even yet I cannot see one and a zero juxtaposed without feeling deep within me the vibration of a dark, answering note." Gabriel, prodigiously numerate, finds in pure mathematics an answer to the rage for order which possesses him, even in the face of inescapable randomness. However, "World is crazier and more of it than we think" – this line from MacNeice is echoed at the moment when Gabriel comes to realize, "I had mistaken pluralities for unities". The search for symmetry leads to disintegration.

Gabriel's surname is significant. Zeus, Leda, Castor and Pollux, Icarus, Daedalus: take "Swan" as a starting-point, and all these emblematic associations, and more, will follow. "Bird-boy" is an early nickname applied to Gabriel by his evil genius Felix-Mephistopheles, or – as it may be – Felix Virgil, the guide who steers Gabriel through a particular kind of underworld, at a time when he feels himself to be enduring his own season in hell. He has survived an accident, but only just, coming round in hospital after being appallingy burnt. Weeks, months of pain and dis-

orientation follow – and there's a sojourn among tramps and drunks, dustbin pickers, drug addicts. The unnamed city in which these people are observed and occasionally encountered is presumably Dublin; this is section two of the two-part novel, called "Angels".

In the first part ("Marionettes"), set in an Irish town resembling Wexford where John Banville grew up, we have Gabriel's sedate and fateful childhood, his rigorous schooling, the local Big House, Ashburn by name, with its lofty family on the verge of extinction. When the last of the Ashburns dies, some unexpected tenants move into the impaired house: Mr Kasperl, with his black notebook, "thick as a wizard's codex"; deaf-mute Sophie, who has a knack with puppets; and Felix, a red-headed rigger and Lord of Misrule, sly and mocking and not to be evaded. "A cygnet, by Jove", says Felix at once on learning Gabriel's name, giving a jesting tone to the word-play and allusiveness in which the novel abounds.

In *The Newton Letter* (1982), John Banville seems to suggest, among other things, that fiction itself is only one way of imposing a pattern on events and perceptions, and a hit-or-miss way at that. *Mefisto* departs from a standard narrative pattern by going in for deliberate dislocations, by withholding a good deal of everyday information, and by having a profusion of contexts for its symbolic overlay. Part Two of the novel seems not so much a continuation of Part One as a more complex version of it: the peripheral figures, odd and astray; the lures for Gabriel – first a mathematical notebook, then a computer. None of this is irritating; the author's strength of purpose and ingenuity keep us engrossed. Whatever he has gained from other authors – Beckett and Joyce in particular – Banville, in the end, shapes his material in unprecedented ways, and enshrines his extended metaphors, his unsettling evocations and moments of ordinariness in resonant and lucid prose.

# American aggression

Jaci Stephen

URSULA BENTLEY  
Private Accounts  
236pp. Secker and Warburg. £9.95.  
0436 040212

After a slow start, in which characters and settings are firmly "established", Ursula Bentley's second novel becomes compulsive reading. The territory is well trodden: three women, married to three men, with a few affairs thrown in for good measure – the kind of formula that is usually allowed only the very bad, the very good, and Jeffrey Archer. Bentley is, fortunately, very good.

B. J. Berkely is the type of American woman everyone loves to hate – loud, outspoken, aggressively rude. Arriving to spend a year in Switzerland with her husband, she sees, in that seemingly ordered, traditional world, a place for her work – sales for a data resources company – and her personal skills as a manipulator of people. As she challenges the roles of the

women she meets – Geraldine, swamped by motherhood; Kirstin, dominated by her robotically cool husband, Max – it is her own world that is finally set adrift.

The gradual exposure of BJ's vulnerability is the strength of the novel: Bentley's humour turns her aggression to something quite likeable. It is against Max, however, that Bentley directs the full force of her wit. "Max would never forgive the disruption to his schedule were she to get herself raped", thinks Kirstin. This is the man to whom it is a major upheaval to talk about sex "in the presence of meat and tomatoes"; to whom television pictures of "Asians being shot through the head by other Asians... was the kind of spectacle that induced... a feeling of well-being."

Bentley uses her characters as a dramatist might: when it is not their turn to speak you are none the less aware that everyone has a part to play, and actions and gestures are always made in response to what is happening onstage. Each voice is clear and distinctive as the different worlds clash, reverberate, and finally go their separate ways.

WILLIAM S. COHEN and GARY HART  
The Double Man  
348pp. Michael Joseph. £9.95.  
07181 26459

When Thomas Chandler, senior senator from Connecticut, becomes chairman of the senate's special task force on terrorism, he tells his team (which includes the "beautifully green-eyed" Elaine Dunham) at the first briefing that he's not a conspirator. But, by golly, his creators, Senators Hart (Democrat, Colorado) and Cohen (Republican, Maine), certainly are. They've whipped together a wonderfully fluffy creation which "links" President Kennedy's assassination with the Mafia, narcotics smuggling, Castro, Cuban refugees, the CIA, the KGB, MTS, the attempted assassination of the Pope, and practically every other event in world politics since 1945. Given a little more time and paper they would no doubt have roped in Sacco and Vanzetti and the battle of Little Big Horn. A slender hold on reality is

maintained by descriptions of senatorial Turkish baths, men's rooms and restaurants. Gary Hart was a leading contender for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984; William S. Cohen is a member of the Select Committee on Intelligence: even after Reagan's departure, there's going to be just as much – if not more – to worry about.

GWENDOLINE BUTLER  
Coffin on the Water  
192pp. Collins. £7.95.  
0002314479

It's 1946, and John Coffin is beginning his career as a policeman in South London, acting as supernumerary in the pursuit of a murderer who sends the corpses of his victims bobbing down the Thames. Interesting and original characters are depicted against an impressionistic, atmospheric background of late 1940s London; but the impressionism seems to have communicated itself to the detection as well. P. J. Blyden

# A French confection

Douglas Johnson

PIERS PAUL READ  
The Free Frenchman  
570pp. Alison Press/Secker and Warburg.  
£10.95.  
0436 409666

Gaston Palewski used to spend his last days in a château that had belonged to Talleyrand, ruminating about the past, and remembering about all the great days of the Free French and London in 1940. "Quelle aventure", he would say, repeatedly, and he was right. *La France Libre* was an extraordinary adventure for everyone who took part in it. Men of mature and devoted patriotism heard the appeal that de Gaulle broadcast, and came to London because they were not prepared to accept defeat and because they were determined to fight on. Others came without knowing anything about de Gaulle, sometimes believing that Reynaud, Weygand and others were making for England. One, at least, arrived expecting to find his hero, Charles Maurras, in some important position and could only disbelieve those who informed him that Maurras was supporting Pétain. Jews crossed the Channel because they were rightly apprehensive of what awaited them in France. Breton seamen slipped out of their harbours and made for the land of their hereditary enemy because they feared another enemy who had become more immediate and more real. Others just happened to be in England or were easily able to get there. There were drifters, romantics, adventurers. Many brought with them their obsessions and their intrigues.

Piers Paul Read has produced the intelligent person's blockbuster on this theme of recent French history. His long novel presents a climax with one of his characters, Bertrand de Roulay, taking the decision to join de Gaulle in London. He was a Catholic, with an uncle who was a pro-Pétainist bishop, and he had made a favourable impression by arranging for an annulment when his marriage broke up. He was assured that due to his class, background and behaviour, he could, as a member of the administration, expect very advantageous treatment from the government of Vichy. But his determination to leave France came from conscience rather than from calculation. We are told that the promise of power, like opium, will induce an *ersatz* ecstasy, but that the certainty of righteousness, like physical vigour,

will induce an equal and more lasting elation. De Roulay is exhilarated to find himself in London, committed to continuing the war, in spite of the confusions and eccentricities which he discovers at Free French headquarters in Carlton Gardens. He takes an immediate liking to the English because they cheerfully put up with the privations caused by the war and because of their patient determination to defeat the Germans. A nicotine de Gaulle tells him that the south will have to suffer, and that Free France will have to have all its wits about it if it is to survive.

But, while London in 1940 is the hinge of the story it is by no means the only part. It begins around 1890 at the convent of the Sacred Heart in Valenciennes, with two ten-year-old girls locked together in an absorbing friendship. They get married, one to a professional soldier, the other to a churlish scholar. Their children eventually meet and marry and thus it is that we are introduced to a host of characters, generations who represent the diversity of France and who live through the dramas of French history. The aristocracy, Catholic and right-wing, encounters the intellectuals, free-thinking, dogmatic and communist. Love, adultery and a pervading sense of guilt add to the ideologies that drive people apart; the enormous cast is swelled by civil servants, Jews, criminals, police chiefs, heroes and opportunists who are preoccupied by their pension rights. We move from pre-war France with its fascist threats to the horrors of the Liberation, the agonies of Indo-China and Algeria. The ending suggests a reconciliation among those who remain alive, a feasible end to the antagonisms and duplicities which seem, in this work, to typify the French nation.

These characteristics are made all the more plausible by the flat prose of the narrative. A love affair, an accusation by cold-eyed Frenchmen that one of their number is working for British intelligence, a priest who wonders whether he can divulge the secrets of the confessional, are all recounted with the same neat coldness. Although one of the characters says that there is too much passion and not enough reserve, this is a carefully calculated book where each view is given its place. As a history it is well researched; as a novel it is not well imagined. There is narration rather than creation; there are stereotypes rather than characters, a stage army rather than a nation. But it remains a competent and professional novel which holds one's attention and gains one's admiration.

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## At every stage

Stephen Wall

PETER THOMSON and GÁMINI SALGADO  
*The Everyman Companion to the Theatre*  
 458pp. Dent. £15.  
 0-160044249

Used of a book, the word "Companion" may equally well lead one to expect a magisterial encyclopaedia or an occasional collection of essays. The new *Everyman Companion to the Theatre* lies somewhere between these two possibilities. Its longest section, entitled "Theatre People", is an alphabetical series of entries on dramatists, actors, critics, designers, and so on. A typical run proceeds from Boucicault to Büchner via Brucegirdle, Brumm, Brando, Brecht, Brenton, Bridle, Brioux, Brighouse, Brome and Brook.

The *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (4th edition corrected, 1985) offers considerably more, including, among others, entries on Bourchier, Braithwaite, Brandes, Brasseur, Bridges-Adams, Brough, Brown, Browne, and Buchanan. It's clear that Peter Thomson and Gámini Salgado have not aimed at Oxford standards of omniscience – and indeed could hardly have been expected to challenge on its own terms a work of reference which first appeared in 1951 and which has subsequently been updated and expanded. However, the fact that they offer nothing on, for instance, the theatre in Bulgaria, the Roman dramatist Marcus Pacuvius, or the Polish director Józef Szauna (all topics which swim into the Oxford net) will probably not greatly distress the relatively un-demanding readers they have in mind.

Nevertheless, the *Everyman* volume occasionally has an entry on someone left out by the Oxford one: it's interesting, for example, to have some details of Joseph Losey's career in the American theatre (he directed *Laughton* in Brecht's *Galileo* in 1947 with the author looking ironically on) before his later celebrity as a film-maker. On *Everyman's* facing page, however, there is no entry for Frederick Lonsdale, where Oxford gives a select list of his best-known successes of the 1920s, such as *The Last of Mrs. Cheyne* and *On Approval*.

*Everyman* is generally weaker on the pre-war period. Among current playwrights, Barker, Bond, Brenton, Edgar and Hare all get good notices, while sympathetic (and some might feel disproportionate) attention is paid to such fringe groups as the Pip Simmons and 7-84 companies. Earlier figures of some significance between the 1890s and the last war – such as Florence Farr, Henry Ainley, Harcourt Williams, Miles Malleson, Esmé Percy, Alec Clunes – are passed over. It's hard to find any glaring omissions, however, and consulting *Everyman* is often reassuring. If, for instance, you wanted to check out Thomas Heywood's play *Fair Maid of the West* (the RSC's new offering at the Swan), *Everyman* will at least tell you that it is "a splendidly adventurous two-part romance". Oxford gives no description, but is confident about the dates of the two parts (1610 and 1631); *Everyman* weakly says "date uncertain". Oxford is typically more scholarly, but here *Everyman* is a bit more helpful for the unacademic theatregoer.

The authors of the *Everyman Companion*

concede unapologetically that their book reflects their own allegiances and enthusiasms, and this certainly gives it a livelier and at times more stimulating tone than Oxford's more institutional gravity. Thinner on detail, they are freer with value judgments and thought-provoking summaries. Oxford's entry on Terence Rattigan is much the fuller, and reminds us that it was he who invented – or gave a name to – the *matinée-haunting* Aunt Edna; but it doesn't offer the terse suggestiveness of *Everyman's* concluding comment that "Rattigan's best plays are about shame". In the difficult and delicate matter of deciding which present-day thespians to include *Everyman* is discriminatingly enthusiastic about Ian McKellen, Vanessa Redgrave, Judi Dench, and even Donald Sinden, but there's no mention of Ian Holm, Alan Howard, Maggie Smith or Dorothy Tutin. Nor are we told about such veterans as Harry Andrews, Robert Edson, and Michael Hordern. Still, this is an area where, even with much more space, it would be impossible to make room for all the plausible candidates; selection is bound to seem arbitrary and may inevitably be influenced by recent impressions.

The other main section of the *Everyman Companion* is mostly made up of very brisk surveys of theatre in its physical and social aspects, of English and American drama, of theatrical genres, and of important companies and movements. The academic distinction of the authors means that these potted histories are full of informative detail, but there's just isn't enough of it for the result to seem other than scrappy. Peter Thomson has written elsewhere with authority on Shakespeare's own theatre, but he can't give us the benefit of his learning in the few paragraphs devoted to Shakespeare in an account of playing conditions and buildings that ranges from primitive ritual to Meyerhold and Brecht in no more than twenty or so pages.

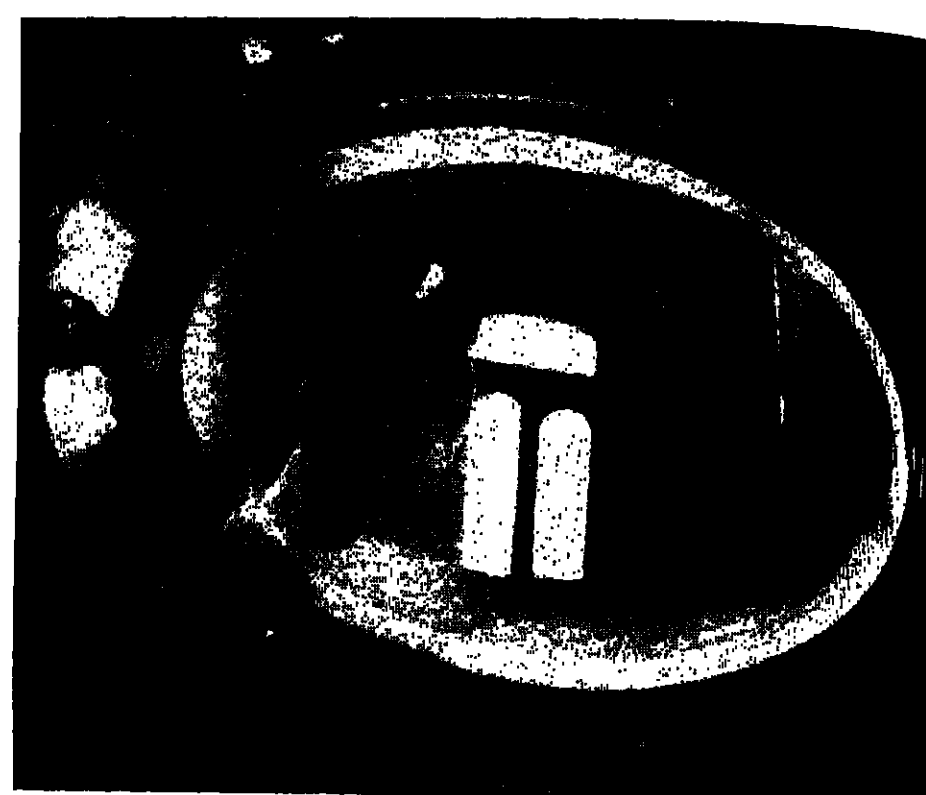
Similarly, only the most rudimentary remarks on Comedy and Tragedy can be squeezed into less than a page (more space is in fact given to Kabuki and Noh). The "outline histories" also overlap with the alphabetical

## Truth to the text

Harvey Sachs

GIORGIO STREHLER and UGO RONFANI  
 10, Strehler  
 341pp. Milan: Rusconi. L22,000.  
 8818570072

When Giorgio Strehler directs a play, he makes use of every technique at his disposal – explanations and commands, threats and cajolery, insults and flattery, tantrums and buffoonery – to get what he wants. Yet he is a supremely rational interpreter and a natural collaborator. At the first rehearsal of a new production he reads the whole work to his actors, demonstrating his concept of every line, every inflection; but as the sessions proceed, Strehler seizes upon every conscious, intuitive or accidental find the actors make. One detail is discarded, another added, and the



Roger Lloyd Pack as Joey in Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, 1978; the photograph is reproduced from *Taking the Stage: Photographs by John Haynes with an introduction by Lindsay Anderson* (128pp. Thames and Hudson. £8.95. 0-500-27442-8).

entries so that there is some repetition (the authors' just indignation at the phillistine effects of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee is voiced more than once). The account of English drama is usefully up to date, and ends with the gloom produced within the profession by the Arts Council's document *The Glory of the Garden* – a misleadingly bucolic title, as the authors rightly note. Their view is that the outlook for the rest of this century is not encouraging, theatrically speaking, and they may well be right.

If the *Everyman* résumés are freshly expressed and lively, the concluding Miscellany is even more so. It is designed to be hospitable to the entertaining and the eccentric, and one of

its useful features is the glossing of terms like "corpse" and "fribble" (a seventeenth-century word for ad libbing to cover lapses of memory). The more modern word "dry" is charmingly illustrated by a story from the Victorian actor-manager Bancroft, who recalled an old actor who regularly forgot his lines and as regularly substituted the following speech, regardless of the needs of the play he happened to be in at the time: "Go to; thou weariest me. Take this well filled purse, furnish thyself with richer habiliments, and join me at my mansion straight!" He then simply walked off. This readiness to admit the frankly anecdotal is typical of the *Everyman Companion's* unstuffy approach to its subject.

Shakespeare, Chekhov, Brecht, Goldoni, Mozart and Verdi) and his views on a wide variety of technical and philosophical issues connected with his work.

Some of his statements even help us understand the excellence of that work, for they demonstrate that his completely modern point of view as an interpreter is based upon an old-fashioned professional morality. "There is a textual truth that the director must discover and reveal", says Strehler. "Those who think they ought to express . . . their own 'truth', outside or perhaps against the text, are committing a crime." And further: "There are those who blush or get angry if they hear the theatre spoken of as a lay-mission. Not I! Impresarios and star actors attacked Strehler forty years ago for these notions, which later gained wide acceptance and are now – again – unpopular. He has simply gone on doing his work, which is always unostentatiously up to date, always classically proportioned, always achieved through passionate conviction."

The 1986 Rank Xerox/Royal Court Young Writers' Festival opens to the public, in the Theatre Upstairs, on Wednesday October 22 and runs until Saturday November 8. There will be previews on October 16, 17, 18 and 20 at 7.30. The plays, selected from all over the United Kingdom, will be *The Plague Year* by Theresa Heskins (aged twenty), *William by Shaun Duggan* (aged sixteen) and *Poly Singers* by Eve Lewis (aged twenty). Hettie MacDonald directs the first two mentioned, and Lindsay Posner directs the last. In addition to performances of the plays there will be each night a thirty-minute special presentation ranging from cabaret, listening to poets and musicians and open discussions with writers and directors including Hamlet Kurek. There will also be a two-day conference (November 7 and 8) entitled "A Meeting of Mother Tongues – Bilingualism and dialect in the theatre" and four plays from young playwrights aged 14-17 will be performed.

## A luxurious austerity

Roger Cardinal

MARC VELLAY  
 Pierre Chareau: Architect and craftsman  
 1883-1950  
 345pp. Thames and Hudson. £40.  
 0500234450

Though an interior decorator of no mean talent, a furniture-designer of high calibre and an architect of considerable appeal, Pierre Chareau might be seen as one of the also-rans in the history of French architecture and design in the inter-war period. He sought no fame, wrote no manifesto and undertook no public project, generally conceding the field to more ambitious contemporaries like Le Corbusier or Robert Mallet-Stevens.

What is more, Chareau's modest output has been largely disseminated if not destroyed. Of the half-dozen buildings he designed, only the *Maison de Verre* survives intact, while most of the furniture is scattered or lost. Almost nothing remains of his architectural drawings, correspondence and notebooks. The one resource which has made Marc Vellay's monograph possible is an archive of photographic

documents, hitherto largely unpublished. The 377 illustrations to this handsome volume reveal a designer of great competence whose works reflect the aesthetic principles and experimental technology associated with Art Deco and post-Cubist Purism, while exhibiting some original features which establish an individual style.

Chareau's furniture designs translate an architect's sense of the well-defined functional unit, and result in durable chairs with sturdy legs and non-sensory desks honed to a minimum of complexity. A spare functionalism dictates his choice of smooth, unornamented surfaces which produce an effect of "luxurious austerity", to adopt a phrase from Kenneth Frampton's postscript. Chareau liked the discretion of swivel tables and hinged components which fold neatly away: a characteristic of his desks is the way their tops slope at the sides and make it impossible for papers to pile up to either side of the work-surface. Perhaps his most elliptical free-standing piece is the standard-lamp dubbed "La Religieuse", a slender upright of black-lacquered metal bearing a cubistic "coil" of white alabaster triangles.

Chareau's forte was the creation of ensembles whereby movable furniture combines with

permanent fittings within an architecturally controlled interior, to form a total living environment, at once functional and harmonious. Working somewhat in the idiom of Synthetic Cubism, he liked to establish settings of variable volume by the use of partitions or shifts in floor level, then introduced fittings and furniture which articulated zones of sweeping largesse leading to corners of sudden intimacy. He liked uniform tiling on floors or walls, only rarely calling on the flamboyant contribution of tapestry designers like Jean Lurçat. Above all, Chareau's interiors embody mobility and versatility, evinced in his predilection for narrow metal frames affixed to the walls on which to hang fabrics or pictures, guiding rails on which doors or panels can smoothly glide, curved cupboards which pivot open, and so forth.

Chareau's close collaboration with the master metalworker Louis Dalbet led to some notable inventions in hammer-wrought iron. His choice of exotic shades – copper, bronze, zinc, aluminium, duralumin – was further enhanced by surfaces being either left matt or brought to a high polish.

Nowhere is Chareau's resourcefulness more apparent than in his architectural masterwork, the *Maison de Verre* (1928-32) at 31 rue Saint-Guillaume, Paris, a most telling, if hardly unprecedented, experiment in the marriage of metal and glass, of strength and translucency. Outer walls assembled of panels of semi-trans-

parent glass allow the building to blaze at night like a giant lamp; they equally mediate external light to the interior, whether this be natural daylight or carefully angled floodlighting. The three storeys linked by open staircases proudly disclose the mechanics of their construction – bare girders sporting nuts and bolts, tubular railings, perforated metal screens, electrical wiring in visible metal conduits. The overtly machine-like character of the structure and its glass cladding put Frampton in mind of Marcel Duchamp's enigmatic surrealist sculpture the "Grand Verre", and prompt some amusing speculations about bachelors and brides which are facilitated by the knowledge that Chareau actually designed the place as both a consulting-room and home for a gynaecologist friend.

Based as it is on the modular principle, the building has all the air of something industrially conceived and mass-produced. In fact, it remains a one-off work, evolved, it would seem, in semi-improvised style as a step-by-step development from the basic sketches, with the architect in close consultation not only with his team of craftsmen but with his clients. This concern to produce an interior which for all its novelty and modernity closely reflects the needs and tastes of its intended inhabitants points to Chareau's exemplary modesty as a designer who seems never to have used his position to dominate or to show off, subordinating his talents to the practice of direct negotiation with other people.

## Letting in the daylight

Nicholas Adams

REYNER BANHAM  
 A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. industrial building  
 and European modern architecture 1900-1925  
 266pp. MIT Press. £16.50.  
 0-262-02244-3

Year after year, young architects with their newly acquired paperback translation of Le Corbusier's classic treatise of 1923, *Vers Une Architecture* (English edition, 1927), gaze at the double-page spread of North American factories and grain elevators and read the stark foreign-accented declaration: "The American engineers overwhelm with their calculations our expiring architecture." Those images of rugged industrial plants, the centrefold pin-ups of modern architecture, are at the root of European modernism's love affair with the United States.

These pictures are best known today from Le Corbusier's book. In fact, most of them were filmed from an article entitled "The Development of the Modern Industrial Architecture", by Walter Gropius in the *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes* of 1913. Gropius described America as the "Motherland of Industry" and praised the American industrial buildings for their "majesty" and their "overwhelming monumental power", comparable to the buildings of ancient Egypt. Such buildings for their "majesty" and their "overwhelming monumental power", comparable to the buildings of ancient Egypt. Such passion for an American grain elevator may strike one as yet another pose by rebellious modernists who, for the most part, had yet to visit the United States, but their vision became a key reference for architects over the next half-century. In *A Concrete Atlantis* Reyner Banham, who has not only seen America but who persists in loving its apparently least lovable parts, has written a fine history of those factories and grain elevators and of the European discovery of the American industrial aesthetic.

The book is divided into three lengthy chapters: "The Daylight Factory", "The Grain Elevator", and a coda, "Americanism and Modernism". The central figure in the daylight factory is Ernest L. Ransome (1852-1917), an Englishman from Ipswich who emigrated to the United States around 1870. Ransome's most notable achievement was the invention of a concrete framing system that allowed for the creation of a continuous glazed wall (hence "daylight" factory), the realization, *avant la lettre*, of the great modernist curtain (or window) wall. Banham's discussion centres on one of Ransome's few remaining works, the United Shoe Machinery Company in Beverly, Massachusetts (1903-06), a work that is, in Banham's words, "the match for anything built anywhere in the world at that time". Banham's

point is that in this work technical genius was matched with what would later be seen as stylistic modernity; and that seems correct, although one might question why the concept of stylistic modernity should be bent backwards to pick up Ransome and not any number of other historical figures. In this case, given the apparent importance of the building to Banham's argument, it is a shame that he has chosen to publish his own snapshots of United Shoe rather than using Patricia Layman Bazelon, the excellent photographer, whose superb work is seen elsewhere in the book.

The grain elevator is a more complex phenomenon, infinitely more difficult to study from an architectural point of view, for such structures are subject to frequent remodelling and renovation as market needs and technologies change. Banham's strategy is to restrict himself to what is, in effect, a case study of the Buffalo, N.Y., waterfront with a brief side-trip to Minnesota. Buffalo was a centre for the transhipment of much midwestern grain and has – or had, since many have been demolished – a fine collection of these elevators. Buffalo certainly provides suitable material for study although one wonders if the story would have been the same had Canadian or South American grain elevators been included. Indeed, grain has often been the cause of splendid architecture elsewhere – for example, a fourteenth-century fortified farm at Cuna, near Siena, almost a medieval *Unité d'Habitation*, has an open room for grain storage that is the match for any cathedral nave.

In the final chapter Banham looks at American influence in Europe. He first examines the touchstone of European modernism, Walter Gropius's Faguswerk in Alfeld-an-der-Leine (1911-14), and the relations of its patrons, the Benscheidt family, with the United Shoe Company. He convincingly plays down Gropius's role as designer of the Faguswerk and suggests, less convincingly, that Americans may have had a hand in defining the role of architecture (as opposed to merely technological considerations) in the building. In some of the most interesting pages, Banham also explains the reasons for a disposition towards Americanism in European theoretical literature, notably in the works of Wilhelm Worringer and Alois Reigl. The final paragraphs are an extensive tour through the Fiat factory at Turin-Lingotto (1914-26): America brought to life on European soil – Buffalo-on-Po, as it were.

*A Concrete Atlantis* is to be recommended to historians and architects. It is the first published history of the grain elevator and of the daylight factory and Banham brings to bear his experience in the grey area of industrial architecture on, so-called, high style architecture. But the book can also be recommended to anyone who enjoys good architectural writing in the tradition of Pevsner, Summerson, Ackerman and, of course, Banham himself.

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# Remainders

Eric Korn

Attentive readers will have observed that on rare occasions a tiny cirrus of criticism beclouds the effluence of my admiration for auctioneers. To the carping few, it sometimes seems as though the great auction houses do not wish to share equally with their customers that risk of disappointment which all of the runners who in life's race must run, must run. Few, however, protect themselves as thoroughly as the folks in Bunbury whose conditions of sale are in front of me as I speak. They disclaim responsibility for authenticity, age and condition. They disclaim responsibility for default by the buyer. Or by the vendor. Or both (if the seller turns out not to own the lot and the buyer doesn't pay, Bunbury still want their commission). They will execute bids, on the understanding that they will not necessarily bid the right amount on the right lot, or at all. "No one in the auctioneer's employ has authority to make any representation of fact."

"You said it was a Rembrandt"; "You said it wouldn't rain"; "You said it would bear my weight"; "You said the very important antique cannon wasn't loaded." To all such plaints a smiling officer of the company will indicate with a gesture that the buck has passed on. OK, they won't tell you what the picture is or whether the guy has the right to sell it or whether they will accept your bid or not. Just sit tight and hold your tongue and you will be all right.

Well, maybe. Everyone there is deemed to be there at their own risk. We are not responsible for any injury or accident that may occur.

Well, look, I mean we are all grown up around here, right? Man goes to an auction, auctioneer's gavel flies off the handle, auctioneer's clerk gets sauced and does likewise, can't expect chap on the rostrum to do anything about it. One of our clerks dropped the grand piano (Taiwan Bechstein Baby Grand) on you and it deconstructed a couple of ribs? Hard cheddar, old chap. Threw a follower-of-Bernini bronze at you and knocked a tooth out? Really, where did it go? Not the tooth. Through the window? Mister, that's our window, that's your bronze at fall of hammer. Like it says here, you are responsible for any damage you or your purchases may do to the other lots, the staff or the premises. Not likely though Sir, is it? Substantial place we have here. For instance, feel these magnificent Corinthian pillars. Steady as rock. Put your whole weight against it. That's right Sir, like that. Oh, Oh lor. What have I said?

I have this problem that I think of as creative dyslexia. The world is full of joy and woe, and sometimes my retina does the work that my philosophy cannot. For instance, I always read Piazas as Pizzas.

For example, I just happen to have in front of me some promotional material for a historical novel based on the exploits of the Albanian hero George Castriot surnamed Scanderbeg, and the author remarks, "The story of Scanderbeg is, unfortunately, better known in Europe than it is in America. [He writes as an American, you understand.] Both in Rome and Tirana, large statues of Scanderbeg grace piazzas in memory of the man's exploits."

And I, whimsical dog that I am, suddenly see all those fast food outlets (the Victorians called them tachyphagotopias, but it didn't catch on) doing a daily-special deep-dish old-fashioned finger-lickin' four seasons (send your friends a Vivaldigram) topped with pepperoni and cheese and bell peppers and olives and capers and a tiny but exquisitely carved, no moulded, statuette in marzipan, with lifelike and entirely non-toxic natural food colourings (ecco she is veritable *una artista con l'età*, no?) representing the Hero of Croya with his foot on the neck of Sultan Amurett II.

Likewise when an architect announces his plan to revivify the environment of London by knocking down a railway station on the North bank of the Thames and providing a new monorail link to one on the South Bank, what gives the scheme its charm and human appeal is the promise of the provision of space for pedestrianism and other aspects of gracious living. On the site of Charing Cross Station, which will be demolished, we are to have a huge pizza.

"Londoners deserve to have the kind of pedestrian pizzas which Venice enjoys."

I'm just glad that it is going to be pedestrian. A motorized Pizza Veneziana would be more than one could bear.

Strong evidence exists that by a process known only to the creator, evolution of men very much like us has repeated itself many times among the millions of stars in the universe. Some of these men are visiting the solar system now.

Breakthroughs in medicine and food technology are being given to earth's scientists much as the falling apple gave Newton the idea of gravity. Elves, gods, and fairies dot our bookshelves. . . . Movies like *Star Wars* and *E.T.* probe our unconscious but as yet too few people are in the secret. . . . You can help. Cultivate conservation corps, the Suzuki method of teaching violin, the Oldens, even sandlot baseball are ministries. The growth rate for some of them, however, bespeaks superior and possibly even unethical recruiting techniques. Write for *Methods of Human Control* before going to any interview.

I can see that some of you might find this a little disturbing. It was thrust into the hand of one of my special correspondents in Chicago and he, wise chap, sent it to me. That of course is precisely the right thing to do. Pay no attention to the increasing numbers of delusives and eccentrics around the globe who believe this world to be the object of any interest whatever to superior beings. Superior beings have their own problems. I can assure you. If you do come across anybody spreading these absurd fantasies, ignore them completely, first ascertaining their name, address, and if possible, blood group. Then let me know.

In a real emergency any electricity meter-reader (but not, emphatically not, a gas meter reader) will be glad to help.

I trust that has set your minds at rest.

Here, for collectors of judicious evasion, cat-jump postponement, and marathon fence-sitting, is a fine and rare example of what S. J. Perelman, tipped off by a Tokyo pressman, called *admonition/kademomo*, otherwise known as other-hand-manship:

A minimum wage law, for instance, is a last and desperate piece of legislation. . . . The argument for it of course is, that there are a number of innocent and helpless people — principally women — who are fellow members of society and who are yet starving in the midst of plenty. These tender-girls in the business world are fainting by the way, they have no where-withal to feed and clothe themselves, they exist but to add to the wealth of others without being able to command a sufficient means to yield them even the sheer necessities of life. Shall society stand by and see this infamy, when by its sovereign power it may compel the payment of a higher and more righteous wage, stop prostitution that flows from starvation, and give to the weak but heroic toiler at life's loom a certainty of body and soul preservation?

These are some of the arguments for a compulsory payment of a living wage. But on the other hand

Now there's an interestingly modern-minded fellow: a Victorian (Edwardian

## The periodicals: *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*

Colin Nicholson

*The Review of Contemporary Fiction*  
Volume 6, Nos 1 and 2; Spring and Summer 1986  
\$15 pa. 1817 79th Avenue, Elmwood Park, IL 60635, USA.

This tri-quarterly journal, now in its sixth year of publication, has frequently satisfied particular needs in rewarding ways. Its usual format is to concentrate upon the work of one or more, usually two, writers of fiction, opening wherever possible with an interview and then presenting a series of essays, interlarded with prose pieces by the author concerned. Potentially, each number offers a usefully condensed introduction to some of the more experimental writing now being produced. Claude Simon, William Gaddis, Julio Cortázar, Michel Butor, B. S. Johnson, Jean Rhys and Camilo José Cela are among those discussed in earlier issues.

The Spring 1986 issue departs from this procedure with a fiction number comprising self-contained pieces or excerpts from work in

actually) preaching Victorian values without the benefit of hindsight.

You can supply the overpowering arguments against, of course: real cause of poverty not low wages but faulty methods of production, if you raised the wages the ill-equipped would not be able to hold a job, "laxness, want of concentration, lack of interest, these and ignorance are the real causes that keep the worker 'down'".

How do I know all this, you may ask? I have been reading Frederick Scott Miller's invaluable work, too rarely, alas, found upon the bookshelves of our youth, *The Devil's Pitfalls*. This is a book crammed with useful advice, from its exceptionally lively upper cover, depicting Main Street USA, with its attendant attractions (swinging signboards proffer DANCE HALL, DIVORCE MILL, SALOON, OPIUM DEN, GAMBLING and WHITE SLAVERY) to its final apostrophe, by way of thrilling cross-heads like ETHICS MUST INVADE WARDROBE, unimpeachable authorities ("After Marriage — What?" by the Revd J. W. Nicely), and stirring captions — "A 'Half-Orphan' Child of Divorce forced to escape from a drug-crazed Mother and the insults of a Drunken Step-father". "Mrs Prince being initiated into a Mystic Cult", and — my personal fave — "Mrs Worthington makes her first step in wrong-doing".

Along the way, too, there are quite a few more exotic evils taken asunder. You probably thought, blinkered child of the sixties that you are, that an enthusiasm for exotic cults was a mid-century fashion. But then you probably thought Philip Larkin invented sexual intercourse. Not, by any manner of means, so. Listen to F. Miller:

What has "come over" our women? Is it not strange to see, in many of the exclusive homes of Chicago, Boston, and New York, sandal wood burned in the parlors as incense to some dark-hued, turbaned, yellow-eyed Oriental? Is it hypnotism? mesmerism? Is there really necromancy after all, and is the light of science turned into a feeble lamp that only shows our ignorance? Why should fair and jeweled hands do menial service to such fat and oily black men?

That, by the by, is no rhetorical question. The answer, we regret to have to tell you, is mere physical attraction, the Oriental's proved allurements for the Western female: "pages of this book might be filled", he suggests, "with accounts of many women made insane by the study and adoration of heathen ideas and deities imported here from licentious Asia ancient in sin". Regrettably he only fills a few pages, though these do include reading of the society queen — a wife and mother — who had taken nude sun baths on the lawn of her residence, the wife of the college professor known "wherever science and literature are revered" who has left her husband to join the sun worshippers "prostrating herself (it may be) in open day and on the tender and unsullied grass, ungarnished to the sun's hot kiss", and saddest of all the wife of an American College

progress by fifteen writers. With practically no guidance to selections included and only one-line "Notes on Contributors" at the end, there are no shadows on the texts and the reader is free to encounter the work purely as writing. Given that the quality of the prose varies, this is both liberating and constraining. Kathy Acker's extract from *Don Quixote in America*, the *Land of Freedom* (since published complete, and reviewed in the TLS of May 23) is disconcerting and promising. Quixote is a woman out to save America; a dog she adopts as a companion becomes another dog and then a multitude of dogs until a Hobbesian dog-eat-dog society is generated. This theriomorphic vision is given a further relaying twist: everyone in the world of the tale becomes an "it". In contrast, "Three Sketches for a Meta-Myth", by Nicholas Mosley, whose novel *Accident* was obligingly described by Harold Pinter as "a most brilliant and singular piece of work", seems a slight re-enactment of the story of Eden: Adam and Eve and their parents, God and his wife, bicker among themselves as incestuous games in the garden are inaugurated.

The Summer 1986 issue, given over to Italo Calvino, makes the need for firmer editorial

President (italics his) who says in a haughty tone "My religion teaches that I am free to seek the perfect life alone".

Personally I attribute it all to pictures of Kali. Well I don't actually, but Fred Miller does, and I have rarely met a man I felt less like arguing with: "in its best executed pictures, suggestive beyond the power of Western imagination to have conceived. Despite its repulsiveness the face and the naked body and limbs are alluring, and the buoyant breasts invite. And there, pondering the buoyant invitation, is as good a place as any to leave Mr Miller."

I have always had a slight problem about non-committal forms of salutation or address. Dear Sir or Madam is an inapt response to someone who signs themselves "yours in service to the Almighty": it is not the appropriate way to answer an erotic small ad either — it's dreadfully bad mannered to seem to be uncool about one's gender allegiances and there's a very prying quality about Dear Lady or Gentleman Peanut Butter Fun Lover, As the Case May Be. If Fred Smith writes to me I can address him as Dear Fred or Dear Mr Smith as the mood takes me; if Charlotte Lady Poole thwaite so signs herself then a free choice of polito-social responses is available. But P. L. Smith is more difficult to reply to. If I address every woman irrespective of status as Mil' won't often offend (sometimes though), but I've forgotten the name, or never known it, never heard it over the telephone, what then? Dear Sir or Madam is no way to write to a client, unless you are an undertaker. Dear Colleague will do for some. Dear Reader's good, but sounds fatuous. Dear Librarian Dear Milkman. (What's the non-sexist derivative of milkman? On the analogy of chair, Dear Milk.) Dear Fellow Sufferer. Dear Scrup Dear Fellow Admirer of Ludwig Van. Dear Person — curiously intimate. More so than Dear Lover. Dear Resident of 47a Gloucester Terrace is the kind of thing computers say: one of them once addressed a friend of mine as Dear H. J. McKechnie (deceased). He reckoned he would have been even more offended if it had been, "Dear Fellow Miniature Book Enthusiast": this comes on a twinkle link brochure with the publishers' address in blotched rainbow, representing the choice of colours (blue, green, chartreuse and mustard, please specify two to avoid disappointment) of Minipress's *Inklings in Verse*, a little book of positive philosophy, inspiration, motivation and encouragement, as advertised in *Nursing News*, the magazine for microbibliophiles, readers of books of restricted size — it probably would not charm everybody. But help is at hand. Oxford University Press have come up with a cracker. Doesn't specify sex, social class, alive-or-deadness, and it's a real comfort pleaser. "Dear Critical Theorist": is there anybody whose breakfast egg will not taste better with that?

intervention apparent. Not only does Calvino's critically pre-emptive fiction require at least a subtle and ironic, not to say self-deprecatory awareness on the part of those who write about it, but his own seminal essay "Notes Towards a Definition of the Narrative Form as a Combinative Process" (1970) might equally seem to jeopardize many of the essays gathered here. In an interview in 1959, quoted by John E. Joseph, Calvino commented upon the "neoflauberian" perspective, as he saw it, of much Italian fiction at that time. "The viewpoint of the intellectual. . . . This attitude, which I have practised occasionally, does not satisfy me. It leads to a static, passive, tired descriptivity." Critics beware.

That said, this issue does bring together a stimulating array of perceptions; better when they are explicatory, less satisfying when they construct categorical readings. I wonder, though, what was in the combined editorial mind when I let pass, in a single paragraph, "the modernist and postmodernist novel", "both modernist and postmodernist fiction", "the true postmodernist programme" and "the modernist self-conscious formalism".

# Letters

Carl Schmitt

Sir, — It is not surprising that Jürgen Habermas (September 26) should be hostile to the works of the German jurist Carl Schmitt. The defender of a politics based on free communication can hardly be expected to agree with an author who launched a relentless attack on parliamentarism as a politics based on "discussion". Schmitt's views are complex and his politics murky to say the least, but his critique of the blind spots of parliamentary liberalism merits discussion and not dismissal. Habermas seeks to put Schmitt off the agenda in the Anglo-Saxon world, to maintain the wall of silence about his work that has characterized post-1945 British and American debates in political and legal theory. We are told the valid response to his challenge to liberalism is to "blanch". On the contrary, we should blanch at this attempt at pre-emptive marginalization.

Schmitt's account of the antagonistic pluralism which bedevilled the parliamentary politics of Weimar and his insistence on the need to bring the "state of exception" into the heart of jurisprudence have much to teach us today. The left in Weimar jurisprudence, represented by Otto Kirchheimer and Franz Neumann, did not "blanch" at Schmitt, they learnt from him and in a critical response deepened their understanding of the necessity for a liberal-democratic legal order. Professor Habermas admits that Schmitt's "criticisms penetrate to the heart of Western rationalism". So they do, and they will not go away unless we develop a more effective defence and reformulation of liberal-democratic political theory.

PAUL HIRST,  
Department of Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1.

## 'The Blind Watchmaker'

Sir, — In his review (September 26) of Richard Dawkins's *The Blind Watchmaker*, Stephen R. L. Clark takes the author to task for failing to appreciate that philosophy is as much a "truth-oriented discipline" as biology. Yet the "god of hard metaphysical theism" of the first part of his review is later replaced by a profusion of capitalized expressions such as: "Living God", "God the Creator", "Creator God", "Divine Creator", "God of Israel" (in contrast to such lower-case expressions as "mere materialism" and "mere materialist"). His final conclusion that "truth is known through love, awe, worship" is compatible with

## SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS ON

*The TLS of October 12, 1911, carried the following review of Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes:*

Most English readers of Russian fiction, however keenly they may enjoy it, find themselves constantly baffled by a kind of strangeness which persists through all their efforts at thorough comprehension. There seems to be always something behind, some misty barrier between the reader's mind and the minds of the Russians of whom he reads. Even a pure Oriental is easier to understand, perhaps because there is no deceptive similarity to start with. In *Under Western Eyes* Mr Joseph Conrad, who has unique qualifications for the task, tries to show what the barrier is. He writes in the character of an Englishman transcribing from the journal, or confession, in which a Russian wrote down the inside, as it were, of events, some of which the Englishman was able to watch from outside. The Russian mind and the English mind have both gone to the making of the book; and the slight artificiality of the device — very different from the clumsy trick of those who want merely a picturesque excuse for writing in the first person singular — is easily forgiven for its results. The Englishman alone would not have understood what he saw; the Russian alone would not have been understood by his English readers. Between them we come, perhaps, as near as it is possible for Western eyes to come to the Russian mind. We begin to feel what Russia means to a Russian — her physical influence, her historical influence, the influence of her Government alone, but of the

this form of expression but, since he is a philosopher, is strangely out of key with his claim that philosophy is as much a truth-oriented discipline as biology.

Anyone who attacks non-belief in the existence of a god by means of arguments in which the word "god" is used as if it were an effective proper name, clearly begs the question. What is at issue is precisely whether the word can be so used. Coming from a philosopher, does not such naïveté amount to grossly unprofessional conduct?

G. B. KEENE,  
Department of Philosophy, University of Exeter, Exeter, Devon.

## Aspects of Copyright

Sir, — I was interested to hear, in response to my recent article on copyright (July 25), from a research student at the University of Regensburg. She is writing a linguistic study of poetic language, using the work of modern poets. She wrote to me, asking for permission to use some of my work, and I replied that there was no need to ask permission for quotations in a work of study such as hers.

She tells me that she wrote to thirteen publishers. After the first six replies, some of which demanded "permission" fees of up to as much as £35 per poem, she was almost ready to abandon the whole venture. Her publisher at this point told her that there was no need to ask permission for an educational study, and she is now trying to convince the publishers to whom she wrote to accept this. If she had complied with their (illegal) demands for fees, she would have paid £193 for about a third of her material. She could thus have paid out about £600, in quite unjustified fees, for works towards a PhD thesis. If her thesis is published she will make no profit.

She asks, "Are publishers really so ignorant of copyright law? Or are they just unscrupulous?" Not one told her her application was unnecessary. As I have said before, one suspects that the whole "permissions" business is a racket, and that in it there are many forms of tacit collusion between the forty thieves. There is an urgent need for copyright law to be re-defined and made plain. For works of criticism or review, and in educational studies, there is no occasion to ask permission for quotation and certainly no call to pay fees. Will the Society of Authors take this up, please?

DAVID HOLBROOK,  
Denmore Lodge, Brunswick Gardens, Cambridge.

## 'The Cambridge History of Iran'

Sir, — I had the same experience as David Horrocks (Letters, October 3) in connection with an earlier volume of *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Volume Three (covering the Seleucid, Parthian and Sassanian periods) came out in 1983. Three of the chapters, contributed by Soviet scholars, were translated from the Russian by me. No acknowledgement appeared.

When I wrote protesting about this omission I received a polite reply expressing regret. However, it seems that the practice of Cambridge University Press has not changed for the better since then.

BRIAN PEARCE,  
42 Victoria Road, New Barnet, Herts.

## 'The Norms of Nature'

Sir, — In his letter of August 29, John Gluckler takes exception to my saying, in my review of *The Norms of Nature* (July 4), that "the most important work [in ancient philosophy] is [now] being done by . . . philosophers", on the grounds that this is unfair to the contributions of earlier figures like Grote, Joachim, Jowett, Cornford, and Ross. These "gentlemen", he claims, not only were philosophers, but had an approach to philosophy which would have met with greater approval from the ancients than that of many present-day philosophers, and they knew their Greek and Latin to boot. My intention was in fact only to make the broadest of generalizations about recent trends. But even if Grote and company are to be specifically included in the argument, I should still defend my position. All subjects are capable of evolution; and my own classical training does not prevent me from recognizing the new clarity and vitality which have been brought to the study of ancient philosophy by the current emphasis on rigorous philosophical analysis of

## Sales of books

H. R. Woudhuysen

The first sale of Christie's new season on October 15 is devoted to a very impressive collection of maps and illustrated books — most of them colour-plate books. The display of atlases in particular is most attractive, ranging from Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of 1595, in a contemporary binding with all the maps hand-coloured (estimate £25,000–£30,000), through Blaeu's *Groeten Atlas* in nine volumes, all bound in contemporary gilt hand-coloured vellum, with all the plates again hand-coloured (estimate £50,000–£60,000), to Visscher's atlas issued in 1689 or later, with its hand-coloured plates, expected to reach at most a mere £12,000.

The sale is particularly rich in books relating to Australia, some with interesting provenances reflecting the country's early colonial history. But as so often it is the colour-plate books of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which are most dazzling. As well as David Robert's *The Holy Land and Egypt and Nubia*, which are expected to go for as much as £20,000 and £30,000 respectively, there are old favourites such as Thornton's *Temple of Flora* (given by Sir Patrick Inghis to his niece "in testimony of his affectionate remembrance"), which is estimated at £35,000–£45,000. Brookshaw's *Pomona Britannica* of 1812 in the same price range and Audubon's and Backman's *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* of 1845–[8] slightly cheaper at £25,000–£30,000.

A few lots are rather more unusual. There is a complete run of *The Botanical Magazine*, in 167 volumes, nicely bound in half-tan morocco and issued with over 10,000 coloured plates between 1787 and 1983; this set is expected to go for between £25,000 and £35,000 (a similar collection with rather less attractive bindings failed to sell at Sotheby's earlier in the year). The seven volumes of William Lewin's *The Birds of Great Britain*, 1789–94, contain 324 original watercolours by Lewin and were elegantly bound for the great book collector John

the texts. Granted, it must be combined with the methods of traditional scholarship — but so, in the relevant examples, it is. I do not of course deny that much valuable work of a historical and philological kind also continues to be done. (How would I, when these are my own proper fields?) But most, I think, would agree that it is the philosophers who are at present making the most marked advances along much of the front.

A final point: one certainly cannot usefully write about the ancient philosophers without "a good grounding in the classical languages" (and all the rest), but one can surely read them. A number of my non-classical colleagues, not to mention a much larger number of students, would be surprised by Professor Gluckler's suggestion that they are not "seriously" studying what they read. Does he really hold that ancient philosophical texts are better dead than read, unless in the original? If he is right, in the long run we are all dead.

CHRISTOPHER ROWE,  
Department of Classics and Archaeology, University of Bristol, 11 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TB.

## Prior Commitment

Sir, — Reviewing Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (August 22), Michael Tanner describes "premature anti-Fascist" to "before Pearl Harbor". Well, yes and no. In my memory, a premature anti-Fascist originally described an American volunteer in the Lincoln battalion of the International Brigade.

DANNY HALPERIN,  
Telegraph Sunday Magazine, Fleet Street, London EC4.

A Philip Larkin Memorial Appeal Fund has been set up to celebrate the poet's life and work. It will be concerned with the preservation of modern literary manuscripts here and in Ireland, and with the establishment of a Philip Larkin Room in the library of the University of Hull. Donations to B. C. Bloomfield, 14 Store Street, London WC1E 7DG.

Ker, the third Duke of Roxburghe, in green morocco with his arms on the covers (estimate £14,000–£18,000). There is a fine selection of books by John Gould, including his astonishing eight volumes on *The Birds of Australia*, 1840–69, in what appears to be a subscriber's copy owned by the Earl Fitzwilliam (estimate £70,000–£90,000). Far more modestly there is an attractive copy of Bewick's *Birds*, 1847, bound by Rivière and inscribed by Bewick's daughter Jane to the engraver's apprentice William Harvey (estimate £200–£300). The rarest item in the sale, however, is a most covetable set of the Oxford almanacs, single engraved sheets in their early years allegorical, but later offering pictures of Oxford, with calendars and lists of Heads of Houses and University officers. With 158 years represented, from the first almanac issued in 1674 until 1850, this is a truly remarkable collection, probably impossible to put together again. It is estimated to fetch between £6,000 and £8,000.

Bloomsbury Book Auctions' sale the next day on October 16 is not as grand, but still contains some items worth noting, as well as a very good general collection of books on bibliography and typography, which seem to be commanding more and more extravagant prices. Three illustrated volumes of the 1760 Paris edition of Racine's works ("a few leaves lightly foxed"), formerly owned by Roger Senhouse and Lytton Strachey, are estimated at £750–£1,000. Among ten lots of books by Robert Graves there is a first edition of his first book, *Over the Brazier*, 1916, which is expected to go for as much as £300. There are some attractive Dutch books, including La Fontaine's *Fables* issued at Amsterdam in 1786 (estimate £400–£600), and in the same price range a rare English printing of Symeon Ruytinek's *Gilden Legeinde van de Roomsche Kerke*, 1612; recorded in the revised STC in only three copies. However glossy the world of books may seem, the world of old (Turkish) carpets is obviously far more serious: two books with a collection of just over one hundred plates of them, produced earlier this century, are expected to fetch as much as £3,000.



## COMMENTARY

## Johannesburg's Janus-faces

David Nokes

Death Is Part of the Process  
BBC 1

In South Africa the issues are black and white; we all know who the heroes and the villains are. Such unaccustomed moral certainties may pose problems, though, for the dramatist who aims at more than propaganda or melodrama. At first, *Death Is Part of the Process*, set in South Africa in 1961, seems in danger of merely reinforcing some worthy but conventional stereotypes: the white liberals, fresh-faced and handsome with open shirts and open hearts; the blacks, peace-loving, decent and humane, full of boyish vitality or avuncular wisdom; the Afrikaner police, ugly and brutal, with harsh, guttural accents, and dressed in ill-fitting suits and hats straight out of 1930s gangster films. Gradually however, it becomes clear that the film intends to explore some of these familiar images. Visually it evokes the Janus-faces of Johannesburg: by day normal and bustling, the pavements crowded with women in bright print frocks out shopping or getting their hair done; by night, a place of danger and fear, with sleek black police cars cruising the deserted streets.

"Don't put words in my mouth", complains Mr Norval (John Woodvine), the main representative of Afrikanerdom, when his daughter, Pila, protests that he doesn't just want cheap labour, he wants slave labour. His complaint is an interesting one, added by Alan Plater to the original narrative in Hilda Bernstein's book, indicating the greater moral self-consciousness of the film over the novel. In a sense the film is a frame-up, which not only puts words into people's mouths, but also adjusts the lighting to enhance a political effect. When the white liberals plot, they do so surrounded by the symbols of their ease: in the sunshine, at the sports club, watching rugby, or polo or tennis. "Everybody trusts a tennis-player", remarks one seasoned campaigner. When the blacks plot, they are huddled around a candle or hurricane lamp, and the intense chiaroscuro gives their conspiracy the iconic drama of an Old Master. The words put into the mouth of Pila's mother — all about hair-styles and what the

neighbours think — make her an easy target. Yet as Pila herself sits by the pool looking, in her pretty pink bathing costume, like a young Doris Day, there is a suggestion that her political activism may be a similar kind of pastime.

In the first episode of this two-part film the liberation struggle is presented as a kind of joyous adventure. Idres (Art Malik), Thabo (John Matshikisa) and Sipho (Louis Mahoney) prepare their bombs like children playing with fireworks, wrapping them in Christmas paper as a sign of hope, not cynicism. In the second episode this light-heartedness is beaten out against the walls of prison cells, yet a tougher kind of optimism remains. Sipho, the most cavalier of the comrades, may betray the cause, but Margie, the Afrikaner wife of a detainee, takes up the struggle in his place. Estelle Kohler's portrayal of Margie is the best among a number of strong performances in this film. With her watery eyes and taut, nervous frame she renders the growth of political awareness as a physical and emotional awakening.

*Death Is Part of the Process* has the confidence, pace and style of a feature film. Shot partly on location in Africa, it includes panoramic scenes of the countryside around Johannesburg not as mere decoration but as a political context. "The most beautiful country in the world", says one character, "why do we allow it to be run by monsters?" Plater's screenplay punctuates Bernstein's political narrative with a number of dramatic juxtapositions. In the novel, Pila's mother has two tickets for a new play. In the film, it is *Henry V* that they see. Pila likes the poetry but deplores Shakespeare's politics. "Politics? In Shakespeare?" says her mother, incredulously. This allows Plater to switch from an amateur Chorus in doublet and hose declaiming in a reedy voice "fire answers fire . . .", to the full-throated roar of an African chorus as the fires of explosion spread from pylon to pylon. Further juxtapositions, such as the sequence of rapid cross-cutting between torture and love-making may seem unnecessarily contrived. But throughout, there is an energy and passion about this political thriller which turn contrivance into optimism and coincidence into a celebration of humanity.

## East is West

Arthur Jacobs

W. S. GILBERT and A. SULLIVAN  
The Mikado  
Coliseum

A white grand piano stands in the white reception-room of the hotel, and a white gramophone with conical horn dominates the rear of the stage. Dancing waitresses and page-boys are in attendance. Is this to be a Twenties frolic — or a parody of one, like Sandy Wilson's *The Boy Friend*? Neither. While the flappers and men-about-town go through their capers, the musical score performed is that of *The Mikado*.

As director of the English National Opera's production, Jonathan Miller has brought off a dazzling and entertaining conjuring-trick. Now you see *The Mikado*, now you don't. Little remains of the original oriental theme — a touch of fingers to the face to suggest elongated Japanese eyes, plus Gilbert's own allusions to Japan. Gilbert had used Japan as an allegorical mask to attack English hypocrisy. Miller seems not so much to be removing the mask as placing another mask (an English one) over it. Sullivan suffers not a whit in the process. The score is sung and played with accomplishment under Peter Robinson's brisk but sagacious conducting. In sound alone it might make an admirable "straight" recording, were it not for the exaggeratedly posh English accents which continually overflow into the Japanese words of the "Miya sama" chorus. It does no harm that Ko-Ko's "little list" song has been rewritten with newly topical references — some sharp, others less so. The Mikado's own song ("My object all sublime") hits its targets with less need of alteration.

Eric Idle is Ko-Ko, with hair sleeked back like the traditional stage "boulder", not tilting

rious in the D'Oyly Carte mould, he nevertheless makes a comic impact while not jarring with his operatic colleagues. At the start of the operetta, it takes only a few minutes for Bonaventura Botto, a Nanki-Poo with kiss-cut and trombone-case, to establish a mood of delight in the audience which lasts the whole evening. His partner as Yum-Yum, escorted by a troop of her schoolgirl chums with lacrosse rackets, is the sparkle-eyed, honey-voiced Lesley Garrett. Richard Van Allan (Poo-Bah), Mark Richardson (Pish-Tush) and Jean Rigby (Pitti-Sing) seize equally happily on their roles. Though the guiding hand is Miller's, one can hardly credit too strongly the part played in this success by Stefanos Lazaridis's harmonious scenery, David Cunningham's lighting, and Sue Blane's costume designs. The white suit for the overwhelming bulk of the Mikado (Richard Angas) will not be soon forgotten, nor the succession of outfits and accessories, including aeroplane goggles, for the humanized and delightful Katisha of Felicity Palmer. The choreography of Anthony van Laast not only amuses, but helps in a touch of the comic shivers when a group of headless figures suddenly trip in to illustrate the menace of the "cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block". As for what sense it will make to such of the Coliseum's patrons as are unfamiliar with *The Mikado*, I hesitate to guess. But W. S. Gilbert, when writing his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, did not feel obliged to consider those who did not know *Hamlet*.

The British Theatre Association has recently moved to Regent's College, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London NW1. The Association's library, which contains over a quarter of a million books as well as press cuttings, magazines and periodicals, and its theatre information service are now open.

## Humane hubris

Katharine Worth

ARTHUR WING PINERO  
The Magistrate  
Lyttelton Theatre

Why, the National Theatre should produce sure-fire popular farces is a question often asked nowadays. Because they do them so well must be the answer, so far as this production of *The Magistrate* is concerned. The National Theatre has the resources too, of course, that Pinero's farce needs (a cast of eighteen and elaborate sets to match).

The resources are not wasted. Michael Rudman's production is a triumph of style. Rich authenticity is the keynote of Carl Toms's sets, from the handsome detail of the Poskets' drawing-room to the functional clutter of Mulberry Street police station. This is a real world and the people are real down to the last minor character. It could almost be said, as it is of Chekhov's, that all the minor characters have it in them to be major. Strong candidates would be the servant, Wyke (Terence Bayler), whom Mr Posket mortally offends by tipping tuppence (in error), and Sergeant Lugg (Michael Beint), who receives the same tuppence (same error) to buy the magistrate the decently sober necktie he so urgently needs. The scene at Mulberry Street when Lugg questions Wyke — "I say, old fellow — is your governor all right in his head?" — is one of the quiet moments of humour which are a special delight in this subtly paced production.

It might have been feared that in 1986 the farce would be gingered up for audiences used to stronger meat. It is not now as in Pinero's day when naughty French farces were bowdlerized to make them "skittish not indecent": we like our Feydeau raw. Apart from inventions like the unexplained appearance in the *Hôtel des Princes* of a woman in pink flounces, Michael Rudman takes the more difficult line of being true to his author and to the nature of a play which turns on nothing more sexually provocative than a woman's attempt to keep from her second husband the fact that she knocked five years off her age on marrying him, so that her supposedly fourteen-year old son is in fact nineteen.

Graeme Henderson as Cis carries off with aplomb his incongruous Eton jacket of the opening scene (by the end he is in dilapidated

evening dress like almost everybody else). He has an appealingly human relationship with his stepfather, the magistrate, whom he introduces to the ways of the wicked world ("Fortyteen — he behaves like forty", gasps Wyke). Nigel Hawthorne as Mr Posket is quite perfect. Quiet-voiced, amiably urbane, pompous, timid yet impressionable and ready for adventure; he creates a character we believe in through all that happens to him. He is not when he chats uxoriously in the respectable context of Act One with his so-much-younger wife, played with convincingly arch business by Gemma Craven; real when he responds to Cis's instruction in "going it" by flapping and crowing like a bird; real in the classic farce situation in the private dining-room hiding from the police raid under the table in the dust and extending gentlemanly reassurance to the unknown lady (Mrs Posket, of course) to whom he is so uncomfortably close.

Supremely believable and supremely funny are the scenes in Mulberry Street when Nigel Hawthorne and Donald Pickering as Colonel Lukyn (a du Maurier officer and gentleman) confront one another across the divide which separates the "criminal" from the magistrate, though both are equally disbelieved. Mr Posket is actually more so, with a black plaster on his nose hilariously undermining his attempt to settle his pince-nez and restore himself to respectability. His account of how he came into his dreadful condition, delivered with wonderful naturalness in a soliloquy to the audience ("What a weak, double-faced creature to be a magistrate") must surely become one of the treasures of theatre-going memory.

*The Magistrate* follows a satisfying Aristotelian line involving Mr Posket in gross hubris — lecturing Lukyn on his misdoings, refusing to hear who the off-stage ladies really are, stalling into court on a high moral note — before coming to the rich peripeteia when he sentences his own wife to seven days without option. The production enriches the classic structure with character interest that goes right through the final unravelling. There is a particularly delicious moment when Alison Fiske, a seductively deep-voiced, earthily direct Charlotte, opts out of the unravelling, grabbing the food she has been denied right through the play and explaining to the audience: "There's going to be an explanation." The warmth and good humour of such moments are a measure of the company's success in recreating Pinero's farce as he would surely have liked to see it.

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 298

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than October 31. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct — in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 298" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on November 7.

1 Symptoms of true love  
Are leanness, jealousy,  
Laggard days.

2 How often have my signs declared mine anguish,  
Wherein I daily languish,  
Yet doth she still procure it,  
Heart! let her go, for I cannot endure it.

3 Now do I nightly waste, wanting my kindly rest;  
Now do I daily starve, wanting my lively food;  
Now do I always die, wanting thy timely mirth.

Competition No 294

Winner: A. J. McGaskarth

Answers:  
1 "Sequelippledan", he would say, "Sequelippledan verboojules." "En?" said Platt, "Eloquent! Rapido-boo-oo."  
H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly*, chapter 1.

2 I am sorry to find you participating in the vulgar error of the reading public, to whom an unusual collection of words, involving a juxtaposition of uncorrelated ideas, immediately suggests the notion of hyperoxypathetical paradoxology.  
Thomas Pinckney, *Highmish Abbey*, chapter 6.

3 Zapp indicated the large plastic disc dangling from his lapel, which had his name printed inside a circular inscription "VITH International Congress of Literary Semioticians". On the other lapel was a light enamel button which declared, "Every Decoding is Another Encoding".  
David Lodge, *Small World*, chapter 2.

The TLS / Cheltenham Literature Festival Poetry Competition prize-giving will take place on October 12 in the Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham. As well as reading the winning entries, the judges — U. A. Fanthorpe, Blake Morrison, Hugo Williams and Alan Hollinghurst and Holly Eley of the TLS — will talk about the entries and award both the judges' and the TLS readers' choice prizes. Festival events during the following week will include discussions on the novel with Maggie Gale, Wendy Perriam, Rose Treman, John Bratton, William Cooper, Maureen Duffy and Stanley Middleton; on literary magazines with Peter Cook, William Donaldson, Paul Thorne and Keith Waterhouse; and on poetry with Christopher Reid, Wendy Cope, Oliver Reynolds and Paul Muldoon. Martin Esslin and John Calder will lecture on theatre and literature and Beckett and Michael Billington, Howard Barker and others will talk on *Our Theatre in the Eighties*. Joint Stock Theatre Company will perform *A Mouthful of Birds*. Written while work will be discussed during the Festival include Jane Austen, Richard Cromwell, Ibsen, P. D. James and Virginia Woolf. Tickets are available from the Box Office, Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham GL50 1HQ.

## In the incomparable spaces

Anita Brookner

François Boucher 1703-1770  
Galerie nationale du Grand Palais, Paris,  
until January 5, 1987

François Boucher fashioned the gods of Olympus and the shepherds and shepherdesses of the traditional pastoral after his own image: amiable, accessible, sybaritic, impeccably turned out, indifferent to censure, innocent of anxiety, purpose, or ambition. For the grand, grim, vengeful deities of antiquity or the haggard peasants described by La Bruyère he would have had nothing but well-bred distaste, thinking his own version infinitely more civilized, more worthy of a place in society. His act of appropriation was no doubt necessary for him from both a professional and a personal point of view: too fastidious, too genuinely of the *ancien régime* to descend into autobiography, he sought a metaphor that would satisfy both parties to the contract, patron and performer. While placating the former in all respects, with his vaguely complimentary and self-congratulatory scenes, effortlessly readable, confining all attention to the surface, playing no games with illusion, eliminating both depth and complexity of meaning, he inspired a vague unease in professional colleagues: was painting ever meant to be so problem-free? His chief critic was of course Diderot, who welcomed his appearance at the Salons with a delight that rapidly turned to disgust. Diderot, who sought the ideal, the uplifting, the ennobling, even the castigating factor in art, eventually voiced his impatience with Boucher's facility in terms which scandalize today even as they must have done in 1763. This man lacks truth, he said, adding that this was no more than was to be expected of someone who habitually consorted with prostitutes.

Contemporary art historians would have Boucher engaged in more self-conscious enterprises. It has been said that the painter is in fact entering into a contract with the spectator, in which the male figure in his scenes of orgasmic language will be bearer of the gaze, and thus the spectator's surrogate, directing the attention to the relaxed female figure who will thus doubly benefit from the attention. This is audacious and may even be true, although it has to be said that the contract only works in very few instances. More defensible is the consensus that the image, independently of the subject treated, will be rapidly emptied or "depleted", leaving behind a vague intellectual dissatisfaction while at the same time never failing to delight the eye on the purely technical level. His immaculate handling stands up brilliantly well in contrast to the dingy or yellowed canvases of most of his contemporaries.

The first impression that greets the visitor to this exhibition is one of unexpected grandeur, of aristocratic imperviousness, and of the most civilized attention to the spectator's comfort. The second impression is of an expanse of soft and barely modulated Saxe blue, a blue without a hint of red, and probably deriving from Chinese porcelain imported by the Compagnie des Indes, et de la Chine. Boucher's well-known love of curiosities — semi-precious stones, coral, lapis lazuli — dispensed him, as he thought, from any dependence on nature, which he is credited as describing as "too green and badly lit". His acquaintance with the paintings of Abraham Bloemaert, whom he engraved, and who often introduced the blue-green leaves of the cabbage family into his foregrounds, might point to the origin of his taste, although there is evidence in many of his works — the Chinese screen in "Dame attachant sa jarretière", the *magor* in "Le Déjeuner" — suggests that he might have been inspired directly from the Asiatic source. Complementing the blue-green is a light, clear coral red, a red completely devoid of blue, and arguing again a derivation from Chinese lacquer. This colour is so favoured by Boucher that it even steals into the skies of his landscapes, infusing the blue air with an atmosphere of evening although the light is that of afternoon. It is sumptuously celebrated in the voluptuous "Ariote sauvé par le dauphin" and by the *magor* in "Le Déjeuner".

scription of the Burning Bush, which, like many of his religious works, is not devoid of piety, even though the protagonists seem in the prime of their adolescence. This red, this blue, together with a soft golden yellow, form the basis of Boucher's palette.

The origins of his style are mysterious and are not unveiled in this exhibition, since his early engravings are not shown. It is known that he spent a very brief period in the studio of François Lemoine, whose rather flaccid "Venetian" mythologies evidently impressed the pupil who reproduced them, in the Wallace Collection "Rape of Europa" and "Mercury and the Infant Bacchus", so faithfully that the attribution has often wavered between the two masters. He was the most prolific of engravers after Watteau, whose small heads and elongated proportions he adopted, although he came to prefer a looser outline, a sack of flesh in which the stomach and the buttocks are exaggerated. His *chinoiserie* also derive from Watteau, since he engraved the Chinese panels Watteau devised for the château of La Muette which have been destroyed. He took a certain *délicatesse*, a tendency to fret the outline in early works, from Pellegrini and Pittoni, and the form of his Italian landscapes, with a palm-tree in the background and a cascade of figures in the foreground, from Castiglione. His extreme elegance, magnificently on show in the superb Munich portrait of Mme de Pompadour, seems to have been his own and is evident at a very early date in his engravings to the works of Molière. None of this is particularly problematic, although it is not well documented. What is surprising, and it surprised contemporaries as well as more recent art historians, who have on the whole been ill rewarded for their efforts, is his easy emancipation from tutelary influences, his almost instantaneous perfecting of a formula so simple and so insistent that most people think they know what a Boucher looks like.

Visitors to the Wallace Collection, if they do not turn back at the top of the staircase to see "The Rising" and "The Setting of the Sun", will remember the Boucher who paints pastorals which could also be mythologies, a little lazy, a little empty, with a vaguely amorous undertone, but, the protagonists being only slightly older than children, essentially harmless and amusing. This is the Boucher who decorated rooms with overdoors and panels which are not meant to distract the eye. But the Boucher who paints "The Rising" and "The Setting of the Sun" and the "Vénus dans la forge de Vulcain" is an artist of far greater implications, with debts to no one except perhaps the Lemoine of the ceiling of the Salon d'Hercule at Versailles. From the need to "plafonner", to create an illusion of heavenly space, comes Boucher's greatest gift to the painting of the eighteenth century in France: the celebration of freedom from restriction. In the incomparable spaces of the many versions of Venus at the Forge of Vulcan, in at least one of which the descending Venus appears much as the Virgin might appear to a saint, can be read that exhilarating desire to outdo nature which Boucher considered to be essentially praiseworthy and which he occasionally took to the edge of the sublime. In his love of fictions — and even his landscapes are fictions — can be read that fascination with the theatre, with backdrops, transformations, and costume, that was as strong in him as it had been in Watteau, although put to different purposes.

Contemporaries said to him that he was "né le pinceau à la main". Ample proof of this is to be found in the fatty, succulent scribble of his drawing with the brush does duty for scores of preparatory studies. Yet he is a sumptuous draughtsman, whose ample forms bespeak a temperament far removed from Watteau and his nervous sketches. The difference in temperament between the two artists is marked, although it has never been doubted that Boucher inherited much from the short-lived Fleming, as can be seen, for example, in early works like "Le Repos des fermiers". The descent of Boucher from Watteau, and of Fragonard from Boucher, is fairly clear to read. Without Fragonard's amazement at the volatility of matter and his celebration of energy as a

pure force Boucher succeeds in elevating, in every sense of the word, Watteau's complex and mysterious scenarios into a lighter atmosphere, in which weather, age, and the contingencies of ordinary living disappear in a conjunction out of time and with little application to experience.



Study of a young peasant girl, by François Boucher. From the exhibition reviewed here.

How serious he was has never been deduced. One line of thought has him mocking and playing at the conventions of real painting and real life. He was said to be libidinous and convivial. Yet his health was poor, he worked twelve hours a day, remained at home with the same wife, and married his daughters to two of his pupils, although Mme de Pompadour offered to place them more advantageously. He is also said to have painted the celebrated (and under-

## Amirani unbound

Frank Williams

The Legend of the Suram Fortress  
Camden Plaza

Four years ago, when a scratchy smuggled print of Sergo Paradjanov's *Colour of Pomegranates* (*Savat Nova*) was showing at the ICA cinema, it seemed horribly likely that we would never see anything by him again. At the time Paradjanov was in detention in Tbilisi pending trial on unspecified charges, and this not very long after completing four-and-a-half years of a five-year sentence for homosexuality. During this interlude of freedom, Paradjanov had been complaining that he had been denied any possibility of work and that in desperation he had pleaded to be allowed to leave for France.

Suddenly the news began to change for the better. Paradjanov was acquitted at his trial, and soon back at work in Tbilisi, making a film for the first time in fifteen years. The new film was, appropriately, to be on a Georgian historical subject, based on a nineteenth-century literary adaptation of an ancient popular legend. *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* was given a screening at the tail end of the Moscow Film Festival just over a year ago. Now it has arrived with remarkable speed in London.

To those who remember *The Colour of Pomegranates*, Paradjanov's new film will immediately strike a familiar note. Georgia is under threat of invasion, of succumbing to the powerful and predatory forces of Islam. The key to the nation's defences, the Suram fortress, cannot be completed as soon as the walls rise to roof level, they collapse. The fortress is saved by the self-sacrifice of a young man who, at the prompting of a soothsayer, bricks himself alive into the fortress wall, so ensuring its triumphant completion. Heroism redeems a history of infidelity, jealousy and perfidy. The youth's father has not only abandoned the serf girl who loved him before he won his freedom,

age) sisters, Louise and Victoire O'Murphy, in a prone position, legs played, to stimulate the appetites of Louis XV, although it now seems clear that he painted the girls when they were still working as models and not yet as prostitutes. The girl in the yellow version looks like a child, while her sister, in hectic blue, turns a more knowing gaze to the spectator. It is possible that the latter's more recognizable face was added later, to please a patron: in any event the pose derives from that of nymphs cradled on clouds or riding on waves, quite specifically from the attendant in "Léda" et le Cygne". There is no disputing the allure and the elegance of his female figures, whether clothed or unclothed, yet with few exceptions they are attended by child-like acolytes whose attributes of flute or birdcage do not seem to offer much temptation.

"N'est pas Boucher qui veut", said David, whose grandmother was related to Boucher's wife. There is envy as well as respect in this remark, for David's early works attempt the same ecstatic agitation that Boucher managed to crystallize and to place unerringly in his Olympian exercises. The huge "Vénus dans la forge de Vulcain" lifts us off our feet into a realm of excitingly populated cloud where swans fly and goddesses reflect on their next move. Down on earth, but an earth devoid of earth colours, cottages, bridges and water-mills nuzzle agreeably without a thought of rising damp. Diderot too must have felt a little envy, the envy of the intellectual for one who manages so well without theory of any kind. Both men were defeated by the splendour of the paint, nacreous, delicate, impalpable, yet positively celebrating the colours of his chosen spectrum. The reforms that Diderot called for and that David fulfilled could never quite banish the genial — and that word can also be construed in the French sense — painter of this world in which negation of all effort seems to be taken for granted. In a nervous autumnal Paris he was awarded the most serious attention.

he has also denied his religion, adopting the Islamic faith of the traders with whom he travels and makes his fortune. The drama of faith kept and betrayed encapsulates the experience of a small people on the crossroads of civilization, whose culture was flexible enough to accommodate the ancient Greek Prometheus, or Amirani as he is known in Georgia, alongside the Christian saints, and whose national integrity was threatened.

Visually, *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* echoes the archaic flavour of the period it evokes without any attempt at literal historicism. It resembles very much the slowly turning pages of an illuminated manuscript, with a chapter heading at the start of each new section and minimal dialogue. The scenes are shot statically; often stiff and formal, at times they burst into movement. The entire rhythm of the film is dominated by dance, whether in actual dance sequences or the composition of individual shots — the balletic interplay of praying men and wheeling horses, of creeping soldiers and fleeing sheep. The delicate precision of Paradjanov's eye, though, is undimmed by a blaring soundtrack of national music.

In recreating the legend for the screen, Paradjanov's interest is far more than simply ethnographic. As with his earlier films there are constant echoes of a wider and even contemporary significance. Georgians are extremely sensitive to the long-term dangers threatening their national values and culture, while the film's reference to the legend that when Prometheus/Amirani is unbound Georgia will be free, reflects a fundamental longing. To impose a nationalist interpretation, though, would be to diminish the richness of a film which constantly delights the eye and offers a series of thematic layers to be pondered and unravelled. On a first viewing much of *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* remains obscure, particularly some of the more refined symbolism. But the very fact of the film's existence is a minor miracle.



# More real than grand

Winton Dean

DAVID CHARLTON  
Grétry and the Growth of Opéra-comique  
371pp. Cambridge University Press. £35.  
0521 25129 X  
SPIRE PITOU  
The Paris Opéra: An encyclopaedia of operas,  
ballets, composers and performers  
Volume One: Genesis and Glory, 1671-1715  
364pp. £45. 0 313 21420 4  
Volume Two: Rococo and Romantic, 1715-  
1815  
619pp. £75. 0 313 24394 8  
Greenwood.

The peculiar French genre of *opéra-comique*, which means not comic opera but opera with spoken dialogue, has always been a stumbling-block to foreigners, who have found it an unsatisfactory hybrid and often succumbed to the temptation to turn the more serious examples, such as *Carmen* and Cherubini's *Médée*, into grand opera by substituting recitatives, thereby severing the connection with real life. It is difficult to understand the form and the way it developed without coming to terms with Grétry, who largely established it. Yet he has attracted little attention in English-speaking countries, from either scholars or opera houses, and is often dismissed as a composer of elegant trifles and naive pastorals. David Charlton's book, the first study of Grétry in English, comprehensively demolishes this picture.

Though not an opera composer of the highest rank, Grétry was an immensely successful and influential one, and not only in France. Dr Charlton does not attempt a full coverage of his very large output (more than sixty titles in the *New Grove*), but concentrates on some two dozen *opéra-comiques* produced between 1768 and 1791. This was the decisive period during which Grétry raised the form from a simple play with songs (sometimes vaudevilles, parodying earlier music) to the prototype for the French Revolution operas of Cherubini and Méhul with their turbulent plots marked by violence, tempests, frowning castles and the last-minute rescue of hero or heroine from destruction by tyrants, floods or volcanic eruptions. Grétry's achievement was the more remarkable in that he was circumscribed by the French licensing system (recitatives, large choruses, murder and suicide were reserved to the Opéra) and by the strong pull exerted by men of letters in the French theatre. Audiences expected consistent characters, firm dramatic motivation expressed in good literary terms and a wholesome moral tone, within which some social criticism was acceptable. Grétry's subjects, so far from being confined to bourgeois and peasant life, were remarkably varied: oriental, historical, classical, mythological, fairy stories and tales of Gothic horror. From the mid-1770s he and his librettists increased the serious content, deepening the characters and introducing (sometimes against opposition) potentially tragic situations, prison scenes and violent incidents, even a death in *Raoul Barbe-bleue* (1789). The last two operas surveyed by Charlton, *Pierre le Grand* and *Guillaume Tell*, were overtly political. As he points out, the conditions for revolutionary

*opéra-comique* were in existence long before 1789. *Le Comte d'Albert* (1786) deals with conjugal love under oppression, police agents and a rescue from prison, and looks forward to Gaveaux's *Léonore* (the model for *Fidèle*) and Cherubini's *Les Deux Journées*.

These developments were reflected in the music. Grétry's use of local colour and evolution of the programmatic overture, linked thematically with the opera and sometimes initiating the action with the aid of mime, directly influenced the Romantics. He anticipated the famous opening of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Méhul's interruption of the overture to *Uthal* with a cry from a solo voice, and several things in Weber, who paid handsome tribute to Grétry's influence in Germany. He employed what Charlton calls functional recollection (the dramatic use of recurring motives), not only in the well-known *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* but as early as *Le Magnifique* (1773), and Méhul's striking use of *mélodrame* to bridge the gap between music and dialogue. He enlarged the role of chorus and ensemble, especially the conversational ensemble that develops the plot, at the expense of the solo air. In *Raoul Barbe-bleue* an offstage trumpet prophetically announces the approach of the villain; this information and other significant details appear in footnotes, which are tiresomely relegated to the end of the book.

What then is missing? Counterpoint, of course, and the rich scoring of Cherubini's generation; but Charlton rightly remarks that Grétry often introduced unusual instruments for specific effects, especially in overtures, and his orchestration is seldom inadequate. He was primarily a melodist; his harmony is uncomplicated, but also unpredictable. Perhaps the flaws in his unwillingness to dominate his librettists. Although he showed increasing skill at dissolving drama in music, he never quite crossed the divide between musical play and opera in its own right. Too many crucial emotional and dramatic scenes have no music. Even William Tell's escape across the lake and the gathering of the cantons, apart from a couple of horn-calls, are left to the spoken word. Later composers faced the same difficulty; but Cherubini, Beethoven, Weber and others not only worked the nub of the drama into the music but had a stronger instinct for shaping and extending their musical paragraphs.

This is a densely packed book. The French propensity for arguing in print about almost anything has left a vast deposit of books, pamphlets, reminiscences and letters public and private. Grétry himself was a copious writer and often explained his intentions in his *Memoirs*. Charlton draws on all these sources and has enriched his text with countless apt quotations, together with tables, statistics and full libretto summaries for every opera discussed. The musical sources are tricky, owing to the scarcity of surviving autographs; full scores were printed regularly, and librettos repeatedly, but they seldom agree owing to Grétry's habit of making frequent revisions, some of them very extensive, involving changes in the number of acts, after the first performance and subsequently. Charlton is assiduous in hunting them down, and ends each chapter with a coda on versions and revivals; but by giving priority to later versions and then dodging back and forth he is apt to make the performance history seem even more confusing than it is.

A somewhat elliptical and allusive approach is indeed characteristic of the whole book. Charlton forces his readers to work at full stretch, sometimes - as in his account of the background to *Le Huron* - assuming more knowledge of the literary and political scene than they are likely to possess. The artistic aims and characteristics of Grétry's librettists, notably Marmontel, Favart and Sedaine - a matter of major importance - are seldom clarified when they first appear; they have to be dug out, often from subsequent chapters. On page 147 Grétry is found sending amendments to a score to one Fitzthumb in Brussels; only later do we learn that this was a theatre director with whom Grétry had been negotiating since the previous year. These are small points; but in a book so packed with valuable and unfamiliar information they can trip up a reader anxious to obtain an overall view (one who wishes to look up an individual opera, of course, and perhaps prevent him appreciating the full ex-

tent of Dr Charlton's achievement in breaking so much new ground. He is in full command of his subject, and indeed of the whole period. His paragraphs on Grétry's contemporaries and rivals Dezède, Martini and Dalayrac are most perceptive, and so is his final summing up, though it might with advantage have been extended from three terse pages to a substantial chapter.

Spire Pitou's two volumes are the first of four to be devoted to the Paris Opéra. They list individually all works performed there, together with composers, librettists, singers, dancers, administrators and musical genres. Derived from earlier histories and works of reference, but making some use of the unpublished *Journal de l'Opéra*, this massive compilation contains much out-of-the-way information but has major drawbacks. The author, a retired professor of French literature, is more at home with librettos and ballets than with music, his comments on which are confined to listing what pleased early audiences. He describes singers as "vocalists", often without specifying the pitch of their voices, and in noting revivals fails to mention radical revisions of operas like Rameau's *Dardanus* and Spontini's *Fernand Cortez*. The definition of Metastasian *opera seria* contains the baffling sentence "The recitativo was to be accompanied by a disciplined score that was to be followed", and goes on to mention chorus and ballet as if they were regular ingredients. We learn with some surprise that Gluck's *Alceste* was first set and performed in German, that the reign of Louis-Philippe was a period of significant growth for *opéra-comique*, and that at that time "the music was tonal and could have recourse only to tonic and dominant cadences". Each entry has its own bibliography with page references, but the dates given are often not those of the first edition and some of the works cited are notoriously unreliable.

The whole work is swollen by a verbose

style, frequent repetition and a considerable amount of irrelevant matter, the exclusion of which could have reduced the steep price and even the number of volumes. Mozart's only true link with the Opéra was the ballet *Le Petit Riens*, yet the plots of his most famous operas are summarized at length, with enormous bibliographies covering his entire career. J. S. Bach, Monteverdi, Couperin and others receive biographical entries because excerpts from their work were included in modern ballets. Haydn's *Creation* even rates a plot-summary. The 130-page introduction to the first volume, designed to summarize the history of the Paris lyric stage (not only the Opéra) up to 1982, would have been better omitted altogether. It is so ponderously written and stuffed with facts, including such marginal matters as piano and song recitals, film shows and balls, as to be almost unreadable. Much of it could have been tabulated, and is in any case duplicated in the encyclopaedia. Moreover, it is often misleading and teems with inaccuracies. The Théâtre-Lyrique, the most important company in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, is ignored. *Le Siège de Corinthe* and *Moïse* are ascribed to Meyerbeer, Vazari 1826 *Giulietta e Romeo* to Bellini, and Prince Poniatowski (1816-73) is identified as the future Louis XVIII. These errors are typical of many.

The encyclopaedia entries, though discursive and often naive, are livelier, thanks to the retelling of curious and sometimes scandalous anecdotes. They could prove useful for summaries, cast lists, singers' repertoires, box-office receipts, the changing names and locations of theatres, the list of directors of the Opéra (with dates), and information about obscure authors and artists; but the user would be well advised to check every detail where possible. There are so many errors of fact and date as to shake the credit of countless statements not easily verified.

## Sound likenesses

Wilfrid Mellers

ANTHONY TOMMASINI  
Virgil Thomson's Musical Portraits  
237pp. New York: Pendragon. \$42.  
0918728517

Virgil Thomson, in his ninetieth year, is still an ebullient *enfant terrible* of American music and musical letters; this retrospective volume, cataloguing music that has been created over a period of more than sixty years, makes an appropriate birthday present. Thomson started making musical "portraits" in the early 1920s, taking his cue, in this as in many other matters, from Gertrude Stein, the friend and collaborator of his Parisian years. Stein's verbal "portraits", not being descriptive in any intellectually assessable sense, suggested a musical parallel: over the years Thomson has "sketched" in sound intimate friends and casual acquaintances, in almost all cases working in the physical presence of the subject. Musical likenesses can't of course be any more precise than are Stein's verbal collocations; but they can resemble Stein in being immediate, and were valued by Thomson as a means of keeping his music spontaneous. "Flowing out of me unhindered by thought, at least by verbalising. I called this trick 'letting my mind alone', or later and more pretentiously 'the discipline of spontaneity'". The pieces are mostly brief, and are stylistically multifarious. Anything goes, becoming for Thomson a kind of psychotherapy, "where an intimacy between doctor and patient can produce a state of mutual trust called the 'transference'".

The (American) innocent qualities that John Cage admires in the music of Virgil

Thomson are thus conspicuous in this raggedly enlivening musical moments, which may be scored for any instruments, though piano, as a domestic solo instrument, naturally predominates. Since the 140-odd portraits are scattered over so many years it is good to have this comprehensive catalogue: in effect a thematic index, with appropriate factual information about the sitter and, where known, the circumstances of production. Photographs of the subjects adorn the pages; the music type is of impeccable lucidity; and Virgil Thomson's preface proves that the Old Master still writes like an angel.



A photographic portrait of Mrs. Agnes Rindge taken by George Platt Lynes in 1936; and below Virgil Thomson's musical portrait of her, "Prelude and Fugue", 1935. They are reproduced from the book reviewed here.



# The state of British history

David Cannadine

In the 1980s, British historians at home, and historians of Britain abroad, are burdened by the simple and sombre fact that the future of our country's past looks bleaker today than at any time during the past forty years. Undeniably, the period from the late 1940s to the early 1970s was indeed a Golden Age for professional British historians, a time when academe in general was an affluent society, and when Clio in particular had never had it so good. In the brave new Welfare State world, where the demand for education and the availability of resources were alike unprecedented, history occupied a prominent and popular position. In secondary schools and throughout higher education, there was a spectacular increase in the number of students and teachers. More conferences, more books, more periodicals, more societies and more graduate students were devoted to the study of British history than ever before. "The present seems thoroughly satisfactory," observed one commentator in 1969, "the future rosier still."

Yet at the same time, our national past was also of a much broader interest, to a global audience anxious to understand how the contemporary world, and in particular the Western world, had come into being. For this account of Britain's past stressed that our country was unique only in being first rather than in being totally unusual: it pioneered modern state building in the sixteenth century, it instigated the first modern revolution in the seventeenth, it generated the first instance of modern economic growth in the eighteenth, and it became the first modern urban society in the nineteenth. The extraordinary pioneer thus became the prototypical exemplar: where Britain led, the rest of the West soon followed, and the Third World might confidently be expected to advance in the same direction at any moment. And, since Britain's past was always anticipating the present in this way, this version of its history naturally appealed to almost anyone who wished to understand modern times.

But in addition, there were many people abroad who wished to know about Britain's past for its own sake. For most of this time, Britain was still a great power: it was the only nation to go through both world wars from beginning to end, and had emerged triumphant in 1945; under Attlee, Churchill and Macmillan, the pretensions to greatness were maintained; and even decolonization gave Britain one more opportunity to hit the world headlines. In America, East Coast Anglophilia was still a potent force in government and politics, and in the Commonwealth, figures like Robert Menzies regarded themselves as British first and foremost. As such, Britain remained a significant force in world affairs, and its past thus remained a significant subject of international interest, with courses in British history flourishing throughout the universities of the English-speaking world.

The result, both at home and abroad, in schools and in universities, was indeed a veritable Golden Age of British history. Yet for all this new and proliferated professionalism, we can now see more clearly that the end-product was essentially the old Whig history of Britain's privileged yet pioneering past dressed up in Butskellite guise. Appropriately enough, these Welfare State scholars had fashioned a new version of the British past ideally suited, not just to the contemporary national mood, but also to the broader interests of the Western and the developing worlds.

Historians, however, are rightly sceptical of notions of "Golden Ages", and in many ways, even this halcyon era in British history was actually nothing of the kind. To begin with, the public audience for national history was already beginning to decline in Britain itself. Although in absolute terms the number of history students at schools and universities was still on the increase, in relative terms, the subject was failing to hold its own against the cult disciplines of the 1960s and early 70s: the social and the physical sciences. Between 1928 and 1968, for example, the proportion of undergraduates studying history at Cambridge fell from one-quarter to one-twelfth, and that trend has continued thereafter.

Moreover, the history that was being taught in schools and universities was itself fundamentally changing: interdisciplinary study was urged in preference to traditional methodologies; global history seemed more glamorous and important than the parochialism of the national past; as decolonization gathered pace, the study of the Third World became increasingly fashionable; and in an era dominated by the new Super-powers, there were growing demands for courses on the United States, Russia and China. Even within British history itself, the rise of new subspecialisms like social and urban history threatened to rob the subject of its structural coherence, by effectively denying that there were any central and

and improvement triumphed instead. The result was, in essence, a Welfare State version of the past. Thirty years on, Elton's early Cromwell reads remarkably like one of Kitson Clark's "statesmen in disguise"; the influence of R. H. Tawney pervades much of the writing on the seventeenth century; the industrial revolution was the crucial pre-condition for the "affluent society"; and the nineteenth century was viewed, in essence, as a prelude to modern times.

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agreed themes to the story.

Underlying these developments was something much more fundamental and much more harmful, namely the triumph among British historians of the cult of professionalism. For the first time, the majority of history being produced in this country now emanated from the pens of full-time academics and graduate students, who were in university employment and in receipt of government funds. The result was that history was increasingly treated as if it was a scientific subject, by developing the whole paraphernalia of papers, conferences and research councils, and by concentrating on precisely defined problems where all the relevant facts could be found out. And this in turn meant that the PhD mentality came to dominate many history courses in universities. Instead of using research to enrich and enliven teaching, the latter became for many merely a means of disseminating their own very narrow research. Even to a relatively sophisticated undergraduate audience, such overspecialized and excessively fragmented courses were often incomprehensible.

So, one paradoxical result of this unprecedented period of expansion was that more and more academic historians were writing more and more academic history, which fewer and fewer people were actually reading. It was not just that the sheer weight and proliferation of published and unpublished research made it increasingly impossible for anyone to keep up in all but the smallest and most underpopulated fields. It was also the fact that much of this output was so scholarly and arcane in its conception and execution that it never reached beyond the tiniest of professional audiences. We all laugh at Jim Dixon's famous article "The economic influence of the development of shipbuilding techniques, 1450 to 1485", which threw pseudo-light on a non-problem. But as we well know in this post-Freudian world, there is many a *truism* spoken in jest.

So, while a few historians continued to produce bold hypotheses and generate new ideas, in the majority of cases, the new attitude of professionalism, combined with the suffocating weight of new research, engendered an understandable but regrettable retreat into intellectual timidity and antiquarian pedantry. Much professional history rapidly became both too scholarly and too critical: sceptical of wide discussion, broad generalizations, bright ideas and creative originality, and refusing to draw conclusions or to speculate provocatively. It was more concerned with trivial truth than with fertile error, more eager to undermine other people's general interpretations than to put any others in their place, more concerned with the increasingly inverted debates of separatist subspecialisms than in building bridges between them, and more obsessed with worshipping documents than with satisfying an audience. And as such, much British history produced in this ostensibly halcyon period was little more than an intellectual pastime for consenting academics in private.

Of course, in the pioneering 1950s, the heady 60s and the still-buoyant early 70s, when professional British history really did seem to be a self-sustaining industry, it was both easy and tempting for most academics to remain within their own expanding professional universe, apparently secure in the belief that their subject was its own justification, and thus un-

concerned to venture into the wider world outside. Provided the boom in professional, university-based history continued, and provided there were still some historians brave enough to offer bold and seminal generalizations, these accumulating dangers - real relative decline, increasing fragmentation, and loss of public function - could be happily ignored. But what if the boom should burst?

Now, in 1986, we are well equipped to answer that question, since during the last ten years, and especially since 1980, that is indeed precisely what has happened. At all levels of the profession, the picture is one of gloom and despondency. In the secondary schools, over half of the pupils take no history at all after the age of fourteen, and entrants for O and A level exams are declining despite a rising demographic trend. In many schools, the subject has lost its own autonomy, and is now subsumed in general courses in the humanities and the social sciences. There is no longer any agreement as to what constitutes a core curriculum; many parents and pupils prefer subjects with more direct vocational benefits; and so history is visibly failing to compete on a crowded timetable. And if anything, the future looks bleaker still. The new syllabus means that even those schools which teach the subject seriously and well, will now impart much less of a historical education; and in many schools in the public sector, there are real fears that history will soon go the same way as classics.

At universities, the picture is no brighter, in part because if history declines in the schools, its decline in higher education is bound, inexorably, to follow. Here, too, the numbers are now in absolute as well as relative decline; many undergraduate courses have specialized and fragmented themselves to the point of almost total disintegration; British history itself is now only taught over a long span in four universities; and in the Thatcherite 1980s, a history degree seems the least appropriate qualification to obtain in a world characterized simultaneously by high tech and even higher unemployment. The large and loyal undergraduate audiences, who saw excitement and relevance in the audacious generalizations of the Welfare State young men, have dwindled drastically. And the belief that history provides an education, that it helps us understand ourselves in time, or even that it explains something of how the present world came into being, has all but vanished - on the part of those who teach no less than on the part of those who are taught.

Among graduate students, the position is even more depressing and distressing, for numbers are declining rapidly, and morale has totally collapsed. Under normal circumstances, no university teacher today advises any undergraduate - however bright, however committed - to stay on and research. We all know of those who have disregarded this advice, who have bravely stayed the course, who have completed three or more years of lonely and underpaid work, and who are obliged to confront the fact that they have gained a union card to an almost non-existent profession. One or two will indeed obtain permanent academic jobs, but in most cases in universities where history is in decline. The majority will be obliged to begin a completely new career, with all the disadvantages, in a country with high unemployment, of being too

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old. And some will eke out a miserable existence on the margins of academe, picking up teaching here and there, holding a succession of temporary lectureships, and consoling themselves with occasional cups of tea at the Institute of Historical Research.

Underlying this, of course, are the cuts in educational spending to which all universities and all disciplines have been subjected since 1980. In the history departments of British universities, some 10 per cent of full-time jobs have been lost in this period. The purge and scourge of early retirement means that our profession has been indiscriminately decapitated, often removing luminaries who should have stayed, and our departments have been randomly decimated, on the basis of age structure and accidental death. Even worse, it has conspicuously failed to deal with the appointments made in the balmy 1960s, who have never justified their tenure, but who will continue to sit on their jobs until the year 2000 and after. But most inexcusably of all, it has not succeeded in opening up the profession to those young graduate students who should be its life-blood.

In all ways, and at all levels, the consequences of this are quite deplorable. Year by year, as more jobs are frozen and almost no new appointments are made, the age profile of our profession becomes ever more top-heavy, and departments ever more stagnant, as we all grow old together. In ten years' time, if present trends continue, there will be almost no professional historians in this country below the age of forty, a perfect recipe for intellectual stagnation and student unrest. Meanwhile, the almost total cessation of recruitment means that young lecturers have already become things of the past, and a whole generation of scholars has been lost to the profession. At the moment, British historians have effectively lost the capacity to perpetuate themselves, which means that when the generation of teachers appointed in the 1960s finally retires, it may prove impossible to replace them.

In part, of course, government funding for history at universities has been cut because government funding for most subjects at universities has been cut. But in addition we are now paying the price for the over-professionalized product which proliferated in the 1960s and early 70s, which has devalued our subject in the eyes of the politicians and the public to such an extent that history has suffered, in the cuts, more than it should have done. For while the great generalizations which gave the subject its shape, substance and success in its Welfare State heyday have been overturned by the inexorable workings of professional research, no new interpretations of comparable significance or interest have been put in their place. Everywhere, there are demands for new syntheses, or claims that new syntheses have been made: but without central organizing ideas, these are often little more than one thing after another.

For what is now clear is that the massive proliferation of PhD-inspired scholarship has served not to illuminate the central themes of British history, but rather to obscure them. British historians today are mainly concerned to show that less happened, and that less dramatically, than was once thought. The Tudor revolution in government now turns out to have been a slow and rather piecemeal affair. In its present revisionist manifestation, the Civil War is but a little local difficulty, with no long-term social, political or ideological causes. And for the later periods, the industrial revolution and the working class have been almost written out of modern British history, both being seen as phenomena which were largely confined to Lancashire, and so not of any general importance. As a result, it is continuity, rather than change, which now prevails in British history, humdrum happenings rather than high drama.

If this Henry Ford view of our national past has understandably lost much of its appeal at home, then how much more has it lost its appeal abroad. For the destruction of the old heroic interpretations, which presented Britain as the pioneer of the modern world, means that its history has lost much of its international allure, and hence much of its international audience. Today, there is much more interest in the history of America, Russia, or China; in Africa and in Asia; in women and blacks. If

Europe is studied at all, it is the history of France that is more likely to command international interest. Even in Britain's former colonies, the weakening of the Commonwealth ties means that Britain looms much less large in their national histories than it once did: in Canada and Australia, to say nothing of Africa or India, the British involvement is now seen, not as the formative experience, but increasingly as little more than an ephemeral episode.

Underlying this is clearly something much more fundamental, namely the real connection between the decline of British influence abroad and the decline of British history abroad. Only during the last ten years or so have we really come to terms with the demise of our country as a world power. The end of empire has been followed by the fragmentation of the Commonwealth; the workshop of the world has become the sick man of Europe; the special relationship with America is manifestly unequal. It is the Pacific rather than the Atlan-

There is, then, a great deal more to the current *malaise* of British history than the sense of gloom engendered by the recent letters from the University Grants Committee. The decline of British history is a historical phenomenon: is it also a historical inevitability? Beyond doubt, certain facts must be conceded. Most importantly, we must recognize that we are ourselves partly to blame for the present low opinion which the public and the politicians hold of professional history in this country. We must face the fact that the very worst that might happen is that history may indeed become the classics of the twenty-first century: self-absorbed and self-enclosed, and thus doomed to self-destruction. We must concede that some of the market for history – especially overseas – has probably been lost for good. And we must accept that the generous funding and intellectual buoyancy of the affluent society is unlikely to recur in our section of the academic woods, at least for the rest of this century.



Ursula Powys-Lybbe's *Taller montage*, 1938, of *Lady Mary Lygon*; reproduced from *Women Photographers: The other observers 1900 to the present* by Val Williams (1992pp. Virago, £9.95, 0 86068 624 8).

tic which is now the main axis of world affairs. America looks to Japan rather than to England, and in the aftermath of Britain's entry into the Common Market, both Australia and New Zealand set much less store by the British link than they once did.

So, while what Sir John Seeley once called the expansion of England necessarily led to a massive growth of overseas interest in its history, what Anthony Low has more recently called the contraction of England means that this process is now sharply – and perhaps irrevocably – in reverse. Britain is no longer top nation, and its history has indeed come to a halt – though not quite in the sense that Sellars and Yeatman originally meant. Over twenty years ago, when Hugh Trevor-Roper compared the histories of Britain and Africa, he described the latter as being little more than "the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant quarters of the globe". Yet today, that formulation becomes decreasingly appropriate in describing Third World history, but ever more accurate in describing our own. In 1986, when viewed from Boston or Baltimore, let alone Calcutta or Cairo, it is not the Kikuyu or the Hausa, the Bantu or the Hottentots which are the tribes gyrating unrewardingly in picturesque but irrelevant quarters of the globe: it is the Cavaliers and the Roundheads, the Bedfords and the Rockinghams, the Anti-Corn Law League and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union which better deserve this description.

Nor is the state of the nation exactly conducive to optimism and hope. Britain has a weaker sense of national identity now than at any time this century: its self-esteem is battered and eroded; its belief in its own unique good fortune has disappeared; it is increasingly dominated by the multinationalists; it is ethically more diverse than it has ever been; and there is more real disagreement in public life about great issues than at any time since before the First World War. The best that can be said is that we live in unheroic times, and it is small wonder that most of us succumb to the temptation to write unheroic history. The worst that can be said is that, with no real sense of national identity in the present, and little hope for a national revival in the future, it is an awesome task to ask historians today to construct a version of the national past which will be as usable and relevant in these times as the Welfare State version was in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s.

But the picture is not all black, and we should know better than to flagellate ourselves into a depression that is partly of our own making and in our own minds. Even a decline of 10 per cent in the number of historians employed in universities still means that the total number of people teaching history is far in excess of the figure in 1939: the massive expansion of the post-war period is not going to be rolled back completely. We must also not equate the unusual growth of the 1960s, and early 70s with the norm: on the contrary, it was very much the exception. We should also re-

member that the central importance of British history has been publicly endorsed by a wide spectrum of opinion, from Sir Keith Joseph at one extreme to the *Guardian* at the other. And we should never forget that we live in a nation with a popular appetite for the past which may, indeed, be distorted, but which is, nevertheless, insatiable.

But even thus put into perspective, our problems remain. Where, then, do we go from here? Clearly, our first task is to persuade the public – both at home and abroad, in the schools and the universities – that history is a subject worthy of attention in 1986. But if we are to do this, we must fashion a new version of the national past which can regain its place in our general national culture, and become once again an object of international interest. This does not mean that we should abandon the search for truth, nor that we should lower our scholarly standards, nor that we should embrace the cruder forms of teleology, nor that we should tell a tale of demonstrable error for the sake of bringing English history to our students. But it does mean that we should give more attention to our audience than the cult of professionalism has tended to allow, that we should think a little more carefully about which truths to tell, that we should seek for general interpretations as zealously as for particular insights. As Gareth Steadman Jones has recently and rightly argued, "If history is to renew itself, it cannot be by the defensive reiteration of well-tried and by now well-worn formulae. It can only be by an engagement with the contemporary intellectual terrain – not to counter a threat, but to discover an opportunity."

But that merely begs another question: namely with which part of the contemporary terrain should we choose to engage? Several attempts have recently been made. The first by the new high-political archive-grubbers, whose accounts of brief episodes in the history of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-century England are so myopic as to be almost devoid of any meaning at all. A second is the revived cult of the country house, most recently exemplified in the *Treasure Houses of Britain* exhibition at Washington, which took a view of the upper classes at once so snobbish and so unhistorical that it was almost a parody of *Brideshead Revisited*. A third is to be found in the recent celebration of so-called British "individualism", which in fact offers a Thatcherite, Little England interpretation of Britain's past, but does so only by ignoring most of the available evidence. And a fourth is the new Jacobite view of history, a wilfully perverse celebration of such obscurantist troglodytes as the Young Pretender, the Tractarians and the Duke of Windsor, which makes even the embittered splutterings of Hilary Bellac seem models of fair-mindedness and tolerance by comparison.

The Welfare State Whigs may indeed be ditched, but if this is the best the new Tories can do, then the future of the British past looks neither safe nor successful in their hands. In one way or another, all these historians are so present-minded as those scholars of an earlier generation whom they so zealously disparage for precisely this error. But with this fundamental difference: in every case, their relation to the contemporary world is one of embittered disillusionment. Unlike their predecessors, they do not engage with the present, except to flee from it. Yet it is precisely in our own world that we should be looking for the inspiration, and the audience we need to revive our subject. In some ways, at least, British historians of the 1980s need to be more present-minded, not less.

For whether we know it or not, like it or not, we will even admit it or not, we professional historians are in being and in business to sell a product; and if we are to survive, our product must compete successfully in the marketplace of consumer demand and in the pecking order of government funding. But if this challenge is to be met, if British history is to be regenerated, if it is to be brought back into our general culture where it belongs, then what is needed, above all, is a new generation of historians to undertake these urgent and vital tasks. There can be no future for the British past without young people to make it happen.

*This is an abbreviated version of the Past and Present lecture delivered on October 7.*

## Textual preferences

John Lucas

**JEROME J. MCGANN**  
*The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in historical method and theory* 352pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £19.50. 0198117302

An American publishing house is this year introducing its autumn list with the announcement that "Literary History is Back". It is an announcement likely to produce a wry response from Jerome McGann, for whom, as for some others, literary history has never really been away, even though it went into hiding from the old New Critics. Or, in Professor McGann's own words, "A text-only approach has been so vigorously promoted during the last thirty-five years that most historical critics have been driven from the field." Now, however, it is essential to insist that works of literature belong in history and can be adequately approached only as they are recognized to be "place and time specific". McGann argues that a "text-only approach" is a contradiction in terms, for in contemporary usage "text" does not mean anything written or printed in an actual physical state. It simply means an ahistorical, ideal "meta-work", and as such is subject to interpretations which are "carried out in relative historical ignorance". Such interpretations can hardly amount to "critical operations". Rather, they are vehicles for recapitulating and objectifying the reader's ideological commitments.

I have gathered together here remarks that are scattered among the various essays that make up *The Beauty of Inflections* but without, I hope, being unfair to McGann. For although the essays are written at different times, and are on a variety of literary works and topics, they undoubtedly have an overall coherence. McGann is confident that if we do not attend to an author's intentions and the context in which he or she wrote and published we are unlikely to be able to say anything of value about the work itself. This is not to say that it is possible to arrive at a definitive meaning. McGann repeatedly remarks that every critic must operate from within a historical moment and that as a result there can be no transcendently "true" interpretation of a literary work. But by a necessary paradox it is those who claim to be above or outside history who become its most helpless victims, a point which McGann makes most forcibly when he deals with Cleanth Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn*, and with Allen Tate's (mis)reading of Emily Dickinson's "Because I would not stop for death". McGann shows not merely that Tate's text-only approach founders on his using the wrong text. More importantly, "the impoverished historical sense of his general critical method appears as an inability to make critical judgements about poetic texts, and to relate these judgements and distinctions to the final business of literary criticism".

McGann is here setting out his own stall. For one of his great gifts is his ability to study textual variants and to produce arguments that will allow us to see why different versions of a text have been preferred at different times. We might want to characterize such a gift as editorial and McGann is, of course, a notable editor of Byron. But there is more to it than just that, as we can see from his brilliant essay on Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". He starts from the fact that the poem was originally published in Hunt's *Indicator* in May 1820. Its next appearance was in Milnes's edition of 1848. Milnes printed a copy of the poem made by Charles Brown, and this has become the standard version of the poem although it differs, sometimes crucially, from the version of 1820, and nobody knows for sure the source of Brown's text. McGann's argument is that the 1820 version shows Keats to have been standing at some distance from his subject, whereas the Brown/Milnes text requires its readers to see "the elfin lady as a sort of demon lover who had ensnared the unsuspecting knight". And if we enquire why Brown and Milnes should have preferred this interpretation we need to keep in mind the fact of Brown's crude behaviour to women and Milnes's interest in pornography. In short, the elfin lady as light woman is specifically a creation of mid-Victorian tastes and prejudices, and the text we customarily read

tells us less about Keats than it does about his editors.

"If the social context of a poem achieves its first visibility in the immediate context of the reader of the poem, the poem's explicit social context achieves its first constitution at its point of origin." This is McGann's emphatic way of restoring the intellectual respectability of intentionality and the remark occurs apropos of his subtle investigation of "To Autumn". Put briefly, his argument here is that Keats fashions a myth of fruition in order to compensate for the harsh songs of reality. The poem is the "dream of a mind that recalls the lost promise of the spring". It is "dialectically called into being... as an active response to, and alteration of, the events which marked the late summer and early fall of a particular year in a particular place". Keats's Autumn, in short, knows nothing of Peterloo, King Ludd, "the absurd Prince Regent, the contemptible Wellington". But Keats cannot directly voice his concern over these matters because of the insistence of his publishers that "the book not contain anything that would provoke the reviewers to attack (they were especially concerned over the charges of indecency and political radicalism)". Hence the poem's wish to "escape" the period which provides the poem with its context.

Well, maybe. Certainly, publishers were at this time wary of what could be set before the public, as Shelley's and Byron's struggles with their publishers make plain. And of course the Taylor who published Keats's 1820 volume was the same Taylor who bowdlerized Clare's first volume, which was also published in 1820. Yet I find it difficult to accept that Keats's poem offers alternatives to particular social and political events of the autumn of 1819. Or rather, choosing which particular events are relevant is trickier than McGann will admit. I agree with him when he says that a literary work cannot be understood "outside of its definitive human context". The problem is to define the definitive.

It is a problem which occurs throughout, as it is bound to do. Thus McGann's excellent discussions of Christina Rossetti's poetry properly make use of feminist criticism in order to argue that "Goblin Market" develops a "convincing positive symbol for an alternative, uncorrupted mode of social relations – the love of sisters". But the love of sisters is a concern, a means of organization, a theme, a subject, that occupies so many writers of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries that you cannot persuasively account for Rossetti's very individual treatment without considering it in this context, which McGann does not really do. Similarly, his effort to restore to favour Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" rests on his assertion that Tennyson is hoping to show that "the English aristocracy has not lost its leadership qualities", and that it can supply "spiritual models" to an admiring nation. The Light Brigade takes back the glory that had been usurped by the French *chasseur*. "The predominant motive of the entire poem... is to institute through the art of poetry a change of meaning analogous to the one which Gros and Géricault instituted earlier through their painting." But without knowing how and whether that earlier change of meaning had occurred we cannot be sure of Tennyson's motive, still less whether he succeeded. At all events, I do not believe that "the entire English nation" can be invoked as sympathizing with what Tennyson is presumed to be doing.

To raise these doubts is not, however, to question the value of McGann's enterprise. It is merely to point to difficulties of which he is himself usually aware. The scholarly and critical tact he brings to bear in confronting these is one among several reasons why *The Beauty of Inflections* is an outstandingly good book.

*Dryden to Johnson* edited by Roger Lonsdale (450pp. Sphere. £12.95, 07221 7971 5) is the fourth volume of the *Sphere History of Literature* series. First published in 1971, this volume has been revised for republication. The essays collected here include "John Dryden: the Poet and Critic" by Howard Erskine-Hill, "Fielding and Smollett" by Claude Rawson, "Poetry and Criticism after 1740" by Arthur Johnston and "Religious and Philosophical Themes in Restoration and Eighteenth-century Literature" by William Frost.

## Sense of period

Penny Boumelha

**EDWIN M. EIGNER and GEORGE J. WORTH** (Editors)  
*Victorian Criticism of the Novel* 258pp. Cambridge University Press. £27.50 (paperback, £9.95). 0521 255155

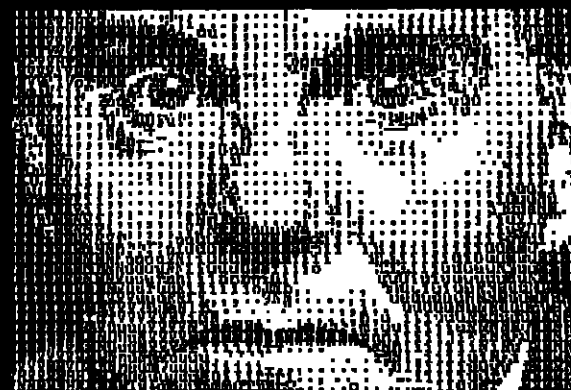
The term "Victorian" covers a period of time so long and a set of interests so diverse that Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth, like others before them, feel obliged to opt for historical typicality – however that is to be defined – as their connecting thread. The essays reprinted here represent certain debates that took place in the course of the period, over such questions as the relative claims of realism and romance, the establishment of the generic characteristics of the novel in contrast with those of the drama, and the place of moral purpose or philosophy in fiction. All of these, certainly, are of some interest, though there are surely others, and sometimes more keenly contested, issues that might also have found a place. In the latter part of the century, in particular, critics were much exercised by the whole question of the "New Fiction", for example, or the various issues centring upon gender, and these are hardly touched upon in Eigner and Worth's selection of material.

The exclusion of such matters seems to depend upon the rather narrow principles according to which the editors have distinguished the theoretical from what they take to be the merely topical. The introductory essay remarks, without really explaining why, that they decided to reject works primarily of practical criticism, essays whose interest is principally as historical or social documents, and writings concerned with problems of the book-trade. But it is not as easy as they seem to imply to

separate such themes from theoretical discussions of the genre. George Moore's *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals* (1885) and Thomas Hardy's "Candour in English Fiction" (1890) – neither of them represented here – both fall clearly into the Victorian period, after all, and both provide vivid evidence of the falsity of isolating the publishing and marketing of novels from their textual contents. In any case, the desire to find works whose focus is theoretical and generic seems to cut across the urge for historical typicality, since much that is "typical" of Victorian criticism comes from its preoccupation with its own age and with issues of contemporary urgency. Eigner and Worth come close to recognizing this in their concession that "it is necessary frequently to read between the lines and to find English theory almost reluctantly put forth in arguments whose avowed purpose was to protect the English novel from theoretical foreigners". (How times have changed.)

The essays included here range from the widely known and freely available – Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" or George Eliot's "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" – to others rescued from more inaccessible sources, such as the anonymous article on "Recent Works of Fiction" from the *Prospective Review*, 1853. The collection will not break any new ground critically, to judge by the inclusion of the standard favourites and by the bland and brief remarks prefacing each essay: "One may say that... Henry James was a major novelist who was also a critic of the novel." Nor do the notes lead us far into the world of scholarship: "Another novel published in 1884" does not contribute much to the reader's interpretation of James's remarks on Edmond de Goncourt's *Chérie*. Still, as a collection aimed principally, one presumes, at the undergraduate English student, *Victorian Criticism* will prove useful and reliable, if unexciting.

**DEREK JACOBI**



**BREAKING  
THE CODE**

— BY —  
**HUGH WHITEMORE**

— WITH —  
**JOANNA DAVID ISABEL DEAN**

**DAVE HILL**

**PAUL SLACK RICHARD STIRLING**

**MICHAEL MALNICK DEAN WINTERS**

— AND —  
**MICHAEL GOUGH**

— DESIGNED BY — — LIGHTING BY —  
**LIZ da COSTA MICK HUGHES**

— DIRECTED BY —  
**CLIFFORD WILLIAMS**

Based on the book *Alan Turing, The Enigma* by Andrew Hodges

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# The divine contract

Anthony Phillips

ERNEST W. NICHOLSON  
*God and His People: Covenant and theology in the Old Testament*  
244pp. Oxford University Press. £22.50.  
019266847

The importance of Ernest W. Nicholson's *God and His People* in recent biblical scholarship can hardly be over-emphasized. The concept of the covenant has been at the centre of a century of Old Testament criticism – a century whose literature Professor Nicholson reviews, before substantially affirming that Julius Wellhausen was right after all. But he does much more than that: using modern sociological insights, he offers a coherent explanation for the emergence, in the late monarchic period of ancient Israel, of the covenant concept, which marks the distinctive nature of that people's faith. His thesis has substantial consequences not only for the history of Israelite religion, but for the theology of the Old Testament.

Nicholson's review of research into the covenant concept, following Wellhausen's publication in 1878 of the first part of what became his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, falls into four stages. First, the period up to the end of the First World War was one of sharp controversy over Wellhausen's assertion that the presentation of Israel's relationship with Yahweh in terms of a covenant was a late development and came about as a result of the preaching of the great prophets of the eighth century bc. Yet, secondly, within a decade of the Armistice, this gave way to near unanimity, in opposition to Wellhausen, that the covenant was an ancient and fundamental feature of Israelite religion. With the advent of Martin Noth's theory that Israel's origins lay in a twelve-tribe amphictyony, the covenant concept was no longer thought of as a theological idea, but as an Israelite institution with a definable function in both society and religion. Thirdly, in the 1950s, this belief was strengthened by the comparison of the covenant with ancient Near Eastern suzerainty or vassal treaties, in such a way that Yahweh was understood as the suzerain and Israel as his vassal. Arguing that the resemblances between those treaties and the biblical narratives in Exodus and Deuteronomy are more apparent than real, Nicholson questions whether in any event such an analogy would have had appeal to Israel, given the nature and actions of the Assyrian suzerains whom she experienced. He concludes that this period of research yielded little of permanent value, though it had the negative merit of again allowing the covenant

concept to be seen as a theological idea rather than as an institution. So, fourthly, in the 1960s, Old Testament scholars, headed by L. Peritt, abandoned the "functional" understanding of the origin and purposes of the covenant and interpreted it as a concept developed to meet the theological needs and crises of the late monarchic period. A century of research returned to its original conclusions.

In the second part of his book, Nicholson analyses the key covenant texts: Exodus 19:36–8, 24:1–2 and 9–11, 24:3–8, 34:10–28; Joshua 24:1–28; Hosea 6:7, 8:1. Much of the analysis has already appeared in the author's numerous publications, though there are significant reassessments of earlier positions which result in a modification of Peritt's pan-Deuteronomism. Nicholson concludes that the covenant concept emerged in the late monarchic period in the time of Hosea, or not long before, receiving its most intensive and expansive usage with the Deuteronomistic movement.

It is, however, the short final part of *God and His People* which carries discussion further. Here Nicholson argues that there is more to the covenant concept than its date. Although Old Testament scholarship has turned full circle, research since Wellhausen has enabled us to see, in a way not open to previous scholars, the crucial role the covenant concept plays in Israel's faith. The eighth-century prophets broke the mould of a "natural bond" between God and his people and re-interpreted the relationship in terms of moral response and commitment. Nicholson sees two factors as involved: first, there were strong polytheistic features in Israelite life which not merely rivalled but prevailed against the exclusivist tradition through the pre-exilic period; secondly, it was believed that Israel's well-being was guaranteed by Yahweh. Through the covenant concept the eighth-century prophets both challenged Israel to affirm her exclusive allegiance to Yahweh and threatened her very existence because of her moral failure. Thus the traditional role of religion in legitimizing the social order and its institutions was turned on its head. Israel's future could not be taken for granted, as part of the natural order, but depended on choice, Yahweh's choice of her, and her choice of Yahweh, which had continually to be reaffirmed. Covenant language served as the focal point for that desacralization of a religious society of which the prophets were the chief agents.

Nicholson's thesis affirms both Wellhausen's position and Peritt's conclusions in a modified form. In spite of unjustified reluctance in respect of Exodus 34:10–28, he at least provides, in Hosea 6:7 and 8:1 and Exodus 24:3–8, sources for Deuteronomistic theology and time

for its development, which Peritt's rigid pan-Deuteronomism appeared to deny. It is a pity that, like Peritt, he fails to discuss Psalm 78:10, 37. Furthermore, the evidence for covenant as an idea rather than as an institution seems incontrovertible. It is not, however, entirely clear that the suzerainty treaties should be discounted. While the command to love a vassal perhaps could not be used as an analogy for the love of God, the treaties might have been first used as a model to illustrate the breach of the covenant relationship. Certainly it seems that the two tablets in the Sinai narrative were only introduced in order to be broken. Indeed both their number and the manner of their destruction and reissue have important parallels with vassal treaties. If the Sinai narrative reached much of its present form either in the reign of Hezekiah or soon afterwards, as is probable from both the central position of Exodus 20:22–26 and the contents of Exodus 34:10–28, then appeal to the vassal treaties is entirely intelligible.

The crux of Nicholson's argument hinges on the Hosen texts. Yet if we are to recognize the importance of the prophets in the emergence of the covenant concept, it still remains curious that only Hosea should use the term *b'rit* (covenant) to describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The temptation for Nicholson is, of course, to see Hosea as the originator of the concept, for there are important theological links between the prophet's work and Deuteronomy. But Hosea's reference to *b'rit* in both 6:7 and 8:1 is almost casual: the prophet expects his audience to know the concept. Despite Nicholson's

survey, scholars are still faced with the paradox which Hosea appears to toss off a familiar phrase which his co-prophets ignore.

What is undoubtedly innovative in the prophets' proclamation is total condemnation of Israel. But their threatening Yahweh's judgment to fall upon the whole community (as opposed to particular persons or places) does not necessarily mean that the covenant concept itself was created by them. While the development of Old Testament religion and theology was certainly forged through struggle with Canaanite practice, Nicholson himself admits that claims to exclusivism and moral choice both long antedate the eighth-century prophets. Indeed they are present in the Book of the Covenant, Exodus 21:1–23:19, which is best dated early in the monarchy. While the people certainly understood that they were being blessed by Yahweh, examination of the prophetic books indicates that this was not because they took their position to be guaranteed, but rather that, in both religion and morals, they considered themselves obedient to Yahweh. Do the prophets do more than reassert Yahweh's claim in both religion (Hosea) and law (Amos, Isaiah and Micah)? All would agree that the prophets offered a radical criticism of Israel's life, but the assertion that they "effected a decisive change in the understanding of God's relationship with Israel" resulting in "a radically new and distinctive Israelite world view" must be the starting point for that further research which Professor Nicholson invites. His stimulating book, for which all students of the Old Testament will long remain indebted, should encourage it.

## Cultural change in the cults

Gerard Irvine

J. G. DAVIES (Editor)  
*A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*  
544pp. SCM. £19.50.  
033402207X

In his preface to *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (1972), an earlier version of this book, the editor, J. G. Davies, of Birmingham University, stressed the primacy of worship over theology: how men worship shapes what they believe and not vice versa. It is also true that worship and belief alike are shaped not only by tradition from the past, but by the pressures of contemporary culture as well. As culture changes, so does religion: a fact not sufficiently recognized by students of liturgy until the impact of Vatican II burst upon the whole Christian world. In the past thirty years there has been a reappraisal of norms of worship in the light of cultural change so rapid that, after only fourteen years, the production of a new version of Professor Davies's *Dictionary* has been deemed appropriate.

A *New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* has over sixty new entries; many of those in the old book also have been modified or conflated to bring them into line with the new perspectives the Church has learnt from a developing society. Foremost among these is ethnic pluralism. Today ecumenical activity has grown out of a concern with merely Christian unity in favour of a wider unity of all faiths. This is reflected in the *New Dictionary* by a long (and excellent) article on Indigenization, as well as essays specifically on the worship of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Shinto – but not, for some reason, of Sikh worship.

A second influence from contemporary culture is democratization. In worship, this is reflected in a greater degree of lay participation and leadership. Liturgically, this is demonstrated by the new and vernacular Roman liturgy; and in Anglican and Protestant traditions by the efflorescence of new service books, such as the *Alternative Service Book*. Paraliturgically, all manner of experiments have sprung up: in the media; in house groups; in schools (where worship is redesigned to conform with pluralist educational fashion); and in the worship of various minority groups, such as the handicapped, the blind and the deaf. All these deservedly receive full treatment in the revised *Dictionary*.

A more contentious manifestation of cul-

tural democracy is feminism. In the Church this expressed in the movement for the ordination of women, but also in the attempt to rewrite religious formulae in "inclusive" terms – that is, by abolishing all masculine nouns and pronouns when referring to God. This, too, gets attention in the book. An article on the Feminist Liturgical Movement is factual; that on the Ordination of Women, judicious; those on Inclusive Language and on Women and Worship are calculated to make the eyebrows of traditionalists shoot up to the crowns of their heads.

Possibly these new attitudes in worship are only spin-offs of a general secularization of society, deplored by most religious persons. Not, however, by Davies, according to whom, in an important article on Secularization and Worship, such religious expression is a celebration of life: "instead of involving a divorce from the secular, it takes the secular as its basis, and so the cultic action is a means whereby we express the unity of the sacred and the secular", a point reinforced by his article on Liturgical Dance. This apparently radical contention should be carefully weighed, especially by those to whom it comes as a shock. Although a far cry from the mandarin attitudes of traditional liturgologists it has some ground in classical theology.

This excellent book is hardly a dictionary, however; rather it is a small encyclopedia. The meaning of a word used in worship may well be explained somewhere in the book, but not in its alphabetical place, and cross-referencing is capricious. Faced with an unfamiliar word – say, rochet, epigonation, jube, bema, or Vartopet – the user of this *Dictionary* might or might not discover the meaning if he already knew that the word referred to a vestment, or an architectural feature, or an ecclesiastical office. Without that prior knowledge he would be sunk.

In a subject so vast as the worship of God, some selectivity is inevitable, and no two persons' selection can be identical. But for all that, there are surprises. I am surprised, I delighted, that Shaker worship should find a house-room; but disappointed that there is no mention of Irvingites or the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, two sects as significant in their day as the Shakers, but which have left architectural and liturgical monuments of the greatest beauty. There are a number of useful illustrations (some photographs, some diagrams), including two pages on the development of the chasuble, which would delight the heart of the most old-fashioned papist.

## Paperbacks

Architecture

ROBERT BRANNER. *Burgundian Gothic Architecture*. 206pp. Zwemmer. £19.95. 0 302 02753 3. *St Louis and the Court Style in Gothic Architecture*. 157pp. Zwemmer. £19.95. 0 302 02753 X. These two re-issues from the Zwemmer Studies in Architecture series are classic surveys of thirteenth-century French architecture. In the first volume (published in 1960 and reviewed in the *TLS* of February 10, 1961), Branner's masterly descriptions of Auxerre Cathedral and Notre-Dame at Dijon are still object lessons in how to look at Gothic architecture. They are at the heart of a far-reaching survey tracing the elements of this regional style from its twelfth-century origins and analysing its early dissolution under the impact of the Ile-de-France rayonnant style. This is what Branner termed the "Court Style" in his *St Louis and the Court Style in Gothic Architecture*: the sophisticated linear style adopted by Louis IX at the abbey of Saint-Denis and the Sainte Chapelle, which sought to translate the delicate effects of metalwork into architecture. Branner reassessed the contribution of some individual architects, particularly Pierre de Montreuil, and explained how the international prestige of King Louis spread the Parisian style throughout Europe, including Henry III's Westminster Abbey. (It was first published in 1965 and reviewed in the *TLS* of July 8 that year.) In both books the arguments are illustrated by excellent photographs.

WOLFGANG HERRMANN. *Laugier and Eighteenth-Century French Theory*. 270pp. Zwemmer. £19.95. 0 302 02752 1. A brilliant account, also in the Zwemmer Studies in Architecture series, of one of the key figures in the development of eighteenth-century neoclassical architecture: the Abbé Laugier, whose revolutionary *Essai sur l'Architecture* (1753) argued that architecture should reflect its origins in the primitive wooden hut, which he saw as the prototype of all subsequent buildings. Laugier's insistence on functionalism (he allowed only wall, columns, architrave and pediment as components of a building) was, however, Herrmann argues, tempered by a taste for lightness and elegance that marks the difference between early neoclassicism and the more severe style which was to follow in the later years of the eighteenth century. First published in 1962 and reviewed in the *TLS* of June 21, 1963.

Biography and memoirs

ANTHONY CRONIN. *Dead as Doornails: Bohemian Dublin in the fifties and sixties*. 201pp. Oxford University Press. £3.95. 0 19 281953 4. "Longest way round is the shortest way home", mused Leopold Bloom, and the poet and novelist Anthony Cronin's odyssey through literary and artistic Dublin and London of the post-war years has something of the Bloom spirit. Friendships and fallings-out with Brian O'Nolan (aka Flann O'Brien, aka . . .) and Patrick Kavanagh, and, in Soho, with the "married" painters, the Roberts Colquhoun and MacBryde, weave in and out of a more peripatetic – and yet more troubled – partnership with the initially appealing, soon appalling Brendan Behan: their adventures in France (The Pilgrimage to Rome. The Flight Behind the Curtain. The Service Under the Tricolour and The Days Before the Mast there comprehended) end in destitution; their closeness ends in mutual distrust and disgust, to a great extent as a result of litigation involving Kavanagh (The Lawsuit). All this is told with sympathy and genuine, unillusioned warmth; Cronin's wisdom occasionally errs on the cracker-barrel side, he is not afraid of repeating himself, but his wit, generosity and facility for the vignette, the set-piece and the sudden, difficult insight are sustained through a wayward, often hilarious, narrative. It was first published in 1976 (and reviewed in the *TLS* of August 13 of that year).

SUSANNA MOODIE. *Roughing It in the Bush*. Introduction by Margaret Atwood. 518pp. Virago. £5.95. 0 86068 724 4. A Susanna Moodie emigrated to Canada with her husband in 1832, to set up a farming homestead "in the bush". A reluctant pioneer, she came from a literary family and was better equipped to write these vivid descriptions of tornadoes, the Indians, the "eccentric" neighbours and

squirrel pie than to cope with practical matters. Indeed, her account is not meant to encourage: "If these sketches should prove the means of deterring one family from sinking their property, and shipwrecking all their hopes, by going to reside in the backwoods of Canada, I shall . . . feel that I have not toiled and suffered in the wilderness in vain."

HUGH TREVOR-ROPER. *Hermit of Peking: The hidden life of Sir Edmund Backhouse*. 391pp. Macmillan. £6.95. 0 333 41807 7. In 1973 Hugh Trevor-Roper was sent, in somewhat mysterious fashion, the autobiography (in typescript) of Sir Edmund Backhouse, celebrated sinologist and donor to the Bodleian of a magnificent collection of 17,000 Chinese books. On this occasion Trevor-Roper decided that the memoirs, though unquestionably by Backhouse, were a fantasy of a most bizarre and scurrilous kind, outlining an imaginary homosexual career involving turn-of-the-century luminaries from Lord Alfred Douglas to Lord Rosebery ("My readers will agree that when a young man is privileged to have sexual intercourse with a Prime Minister, my proposal regarding the *modus operandi* must emanate from the latter"). This inspired Trevor-Roper to search out the facts of Backhouse's life and this eloquently related story of the scholar, the secret agent and the criminal (to name just three of his guises) is even more fascinating than the fantasy. The biography was first published under the title *A Hidden Life: The enigma of Sir Edmund Backhouse* in 1976 and reviewed in the *TLS* of October 29 of that year, provoking some correspondence and an interesting supplementary article by Richard Ellmann in the issue of November 26.

FLORA TRISTAN. *Peregrinations of a Pariah*. Translated, edited and introduced by Jean Hawkes. 312pp. Virago. £4.95. 0 86068 477 6. This is the first English translation of the Peruvian adventures of Flora Tristan (1803–1844), ardent French socialist and feminist. Tristan's journey in 1833 was inspired by her complicated personal affairs. Estranged from the husband she had been forced to marry at twenty, she hoped to support her children by claiming a share of her father's family fortune in Peru. The trip was a financial failure but her impetuous, excitable and highly curious nature made her account delightfully entertaining, if sometimes unreliable. Leaving her children in France, she travelled as a single woman – which led to problems when the devoted Captain Chabrie proposed *en route*. Forswearing romance, she pressed on by mule to her uncle's family at Arequipa where she reported animatedly on everything from life in a convent to the morbid sensitivity of llamas and became an eager intermediary in a military coup. Tristan was also the author of the remarkable *London Journal* (translated by Jean Hawkes and already published by Virago), exposing London's slums, prisons and brothels.

History

GWYN JONES. *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse voyages of discovery and settlement to Iceland, Greenland and North America*. 337pp. Oxford University Press. £4.95. 0 19 28516 0 8. Gwyn Jones's history was first published in 1964 and was reviewed most favourably in the *TLS* of March 12 of that year. Now Jones has thoroughly revised and enlarged the book to take account of the substantial advances in this field. These include archaeological and anthropological developments, a more detailed grasp of Nordic maritime technology and new studies of the documentary sources. And for any readers who still believe that Columbus discovered America, the evidence that the Norsemen got there first is no incontestable. Also included in the book are Jones's own translations of the basic written source material and useful essays (new to this edition) on the possibilities of contact between native American Eskimos or Indians and the Norsemen and on the failure of the Greenland colonies. An impressive and enthralling study.

EDWARD PESSEN. *The Log Cabin Myth: The social backgrounds of the Presidents*. 208pp. Yale University Press. £8.95. 0 300 03754 6. In one of the most quietly iconoclastic and

lucidly argued scholarly works on the Presidency since Richard Hofstadter's *The American Politician* thirty-eight years ago, Professor Edward Pessen of New York's City University destroys the legend – supported by popular tradition, the forty men themselves and their biographers – that America's Presidents have been low-born and self-made. As Pessen views it, Lincoln's obscure successor Andrew Johnson (1865–69) is the single exception – upper lower-class, self-made, industrious and unique too in his choice of a humble bride, "Eliza McCordle, a young orphan, daughter to shoemaker". Pessen exposes a lie perpetuated at four-yearly intervals since the election of George Washington. He persuasively concludes that their "privileged social origins and backgrounds played a significant part in shaping the ideologically conservative philosophies and political policies of the presidents".

Humour

STEPHEN POTTER. *The Complete Upmanship*. 349pp. Grafton. £6.95. 0 246 13042 3. Stephen Potter, the pioneering critic of D. H. Lawrence, is now better known as the man who gave to the English language the words "gamesmanship" ("the art of winning games without actually cheating") and "brinkmanship" (a form of international lifemanship which is the art of "winning the world without actually blowing it up"). But there's more to it than that as can be seen in this first one-volume paperback edition of these four comic classics, *Gamesmanship, Lifemanship, One-Upmanship and Supremanship* (reviewed in the *TLS* in the issues of November 22, 1947; November 17, 1950; October 10, 1952; and October 24, 1958 respectively). All four are funny, brilliantly written but above all marvellously acute exposures of what Edmund Wilson saw as the supreme function of British manners: to make people feel ill at ease.

Letters

ROBERT HALSBAND (Editor). *The Selected Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. 310pp. Penguin. £5.95. 0 14 057026 8. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) was one of the great letter writers. She was not just intelligent and witty; she had a most remarkable life to be intelligent and witty about. Through these letters we follow the birth of her affair with Edward Wortley Montagu, their elopement, the slow failure of their marriage; glimpses of Turkey through the eyes of an Ambassador's wife, her return to London high society; and then, as if anticipating Samuel Richardson at his most melodramatic, her passionate letters to Francesco Algarotti, whom she pursued around Italy to her eventual disappointment. There are as many of the letters as most general readers will want to tackle, with unfussy notes and a sensible commentary.

Reference

A. S. HORNEY. *Oxford Paperback American Dictionary*. 736pp. Oxford University Press. £4.95. 0 19 281992 5. In a radio talk twenty years ago, Margherita Laski coined the useful, if patronizing, adjectives "over-dictionaryed" and "under-dictionaryed" to describe the lexicographical requirements of British households – did the families need assistance for solving crosswords, complex reading, settling etymological arguments, preparing their children for examinations, or simply browsing? This inexpensive book (an unimaginative adaptation of *The Oxford Student's Dictionary of Current English*), might possibly be of value to British editors of American texts (though nowadays British publishers can't afford, or don't bother, to make their own versions). Few others will consult it. As a desk book, *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary* is smaller, cheaper, quasi-etymological and has two-and-a-half times as many entries (to 82,000 words). As for browsing, Norman Moss's *The British American Dictionary* is far more entertaining and provocative.

Reviews by Sebastian Wornell, Andrew Graham-Dixon, Alan Jenkins, Anne Boston, Sam French, Benji Gejrot and Philip French.

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